

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA



THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

(THE GREAT EPIC OF ANCIENT INDIA)

Retold by

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FOREWORD BY THE AUTHORS

The two epic poems, the Rāmāyana, known as the Ādi Kāvya, by Vālmiki, and the Mahābhārata, known as the fifth Veda, by Vyāsa, are a very important part of the rich cultural heritage that has come down to us from very ancient times.

After the first settlement of the Āryans in the land of the five rivers, the rival clans of the immigrants must have fought among themselves for gaining overall political supremacy. It must have been the usual ambition of the leaders of these clans to perform the Rājasūya and the Ashwamedha yajnas. The heroic deeds of certain distinguished 'chieftains' became the theme of early epic poetry.

Songs, orally sung by bards or minstrels in honour of such great heroes, must have been quite popular in early times. As a result, two great epics have come to us as a legacy of ancient Indian civilisation; just as in the sister Āryan civilisation of Greece, two Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, have come as a legacy.

The hymns of the Vedas, which are the most ancient literature of the world, do not mention the deeds of Rāma, Kṛishṇa, Yudhishtira and Arjuna, but references to Indra and other gods whose protection was sought by the early Āryans in their onward advance in India, was a step in the direction of the Indian epic poetry.

Initially these heroes were just men of great strength and prowess, distinguishing themselves in military exploits but in due course they became semi-divine or divine personages. A supernatural touch was given to the stories of their birth, deeds and death.

It cannot be denied that the early castings of these epics were based on certain historical truths.

The nucleus of the Mahābhārata was the simple story of the family feud leading to the battle of Kurukshetra between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, both descendants of the mighty king, Bharata.

The Bharatas have been referred to in the Rigveda as a great martial clan holding sway over the regions between the Gangā and the Yamunā. Pānini defines Bhārat as the battle of the Bharatas—the fierce battle fought among two rival groups of the descendants of Bharata. The Mahābhārata means the great narrative of the battle of Kurukshetra. It is so known because of its volume, enormous size and import.

In due course, through the passage of centuries, not one person but a succession of persons, possessing high creative vision and imagination and equally high power of poetic articulation, have interwoven their own compositions in the original texture.

Today, the Mahābhārata is a monumental work. It is the largest epic poem of the world. The Mahābhārata has been compared with the Iliad of Homer, while the Rāmāyaṇa with the Odyssey of the same poet. The comparison is apt only to a certain degree. The Rāmāyaṇa is three times the size of the Iliad and the Mahābhārata is four times the size of the Rāmāyaṇa.

The additions, which have been made later, could not have been based on historical truths. The ancient concept of 'Itihāsa' was different from the modern scientific concept of history. The epic poems are not 'Itihāsa' in the modern sense but they cannot be dismissed as pure myth as well either. They are not wholly '*Mithyā*'.

The present book does not eliminate the myths and legends wholly. They have an important place for the young minds to enjoy some fun. Besides, if correctly interpreted and understood, these myths and legends throw considerable light on the contemporary domestic and social life.

Significantly, the main attraction of the Mahābhārata lies neither in the din and clash of weapons on the battlefield, nor in any stories of love and romance, nor in any myths and legends. The chief merit of this great 'cultural potential' lies in more meaningful ways.

Basically, the Mahābhārata is the story of the evils of vanity, ambition, anger, hatred and greed. It tells us of the codes of honour to be observed and in the same breath it gives us multiple examples of their breach by the highest and the noblest of the age. The story enables us to pass alternatively through periods of joy and sorrow and this helps us to cleanse our inner self and lift us from the earthly to the celestial, which is more real. The story can also help us, if we so strive, to attain the Holy Life and the Eternal Bliss, as the Pāṇdavas and Draupadī attained after casting off the mortal bodies.

The Mahābhārata, which is a vast tree of 'Virtues' on one side and another vast tree of 'Passions' on the other, significantly guides a man through the conflicts of life.

Each character, each scene, each action, each dialogue and each discourse has a contribution to make in some field—ethical, political, sociological, religious or even military in character. The art of living in this

world and the science of attaining 'Eternal Bliss' in the next have been expounded with artistic perfection by the poets.

The Mahābhārata has had a culturing influence in Indian society through ages and has its relevance even today. In the changing concept of life, with growing stress on materialism, the study of the Mahābhārata can have a potent and sobering influence on the young minds in formulation of their character and their behaviour in domestic, social, political and religious fields. The Mahābhārata is not a religious text of Dharma; it has a secular, popular and human approach

Although our presentation of Mahābhārata here is in the story form, we have tried to retain the spiritual impact of the original verses

We have used diacritical marks on five letters in this book:

ā is to be pronounced as a in Ram

ī is to be pronounced as ee in Kunti

ū is to be pronounced as ou in you

ṛ is to be pronounced as r in Krishna

ṇ is to be pronounced as n in Krishna

—Authors

APPRECIATIONS

"Although the Hindus, like the Greeks, have only two great epic poems—the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata—yet to compare these vast compositions with the Iliad and the Odyssey, is to compare the Indus and the Ganges, rising in the snows of the world's most colossal ranges, swollen by numerous tributaries, spreading into vast shallows or branching into deep divergent channels, with the streams of Attica or the mountain torrents of Thessaly. There is, in fact, an immensity of bulk about this...."

—Monier Williams

"The Mahābhārata is a great and wonderful story. The sorrows of human life are painted with sublime beauty and rolled out in a great panorama. Behind the story of errors and sorrows, the poet enables us to have a vision of the Transcendent Reality. Thus, it is that the Mahabharata, though a story, has come to be a book of Dharma. This book in style and substance is altogether different from tales and romances."

—C. Rajagopalāchāri

"The Mahābhārata is much more than an epic story of the heroic age of ancient India. It is a vast repository of Hindu traditional lore, philosophy and legend."

—Edward P. Rice

*"A wondrous story of the Bharata race—
A picture of Law of Life and Love,
Within us and without, around and above—
The light we see in each new form and face.*

*We play as little children on the sands
And gather shells, and listen to the tales
In Orient echoes borne across the vales—
Of ancient people and forgotten lands,
Who dived into the secrets of the stars,
And proved the mysteries of Night and Day,
And gazed into our hearts with human eyes.*

*Is this a language of those deadly wars,
Or else the Senses and the Soul at play,
The voice of God we hear in Sacrifice."*

Janamejaya, the King of Hastināpur, the great grandson of Yudhishtira, asked the great sage, Vaishampāyana:

"How arose the quarrel among those men of unblemished deeds?

"How occurred the great war which became the cause of destruction of so many beings?"

Vaishampāyana answered his question thus, in the words of his teacher, the sage, Vyāsa:

"Whatever is (present) here may be found elsewhere;

What is not (present) here cannot be found anywhere else."

THE PROLOGUE

Vyāsa, the son of the great sage, Pārāshara, gave the divine epic of the Mahābhārata to the world.

Having conceived the Mahābhārata, Vyāsa thought of the means of giving it to the world. He meditated on Brahmā and requested him to give him someone who could take down his dictation at the speed of his thought and speech.

Brahmā praised Vyāsa and advised him to invoke Gaṇapati, who agreed to write it down, as dictated by Vyāsa, but he laid down one condition—his pen must not stop while he was writing.

Vyāsa accepted the condition but put forth a counter-condition: “Be it so, but you must understand the meaning of what I dictate before you write it down.”

Ganapati accepted the condition . Occasionally Vyāsa composed some complex stanzas which made Ganapati pause awhile and during that interval Vyāsa got time to compose more stanzas in his mind.

Vyāsa taught the great epic to his son, the sage Shuka; later he expounded it to many other disciples.

According to tradition, Nārada told the story to the gods, while Shuka told it to the gāndharvas, the rākshasas and the yakshas.

Vaishampāyana, one of the chief disciples of Vyāsa, revealed the epic for the benefit of humanity. Janamejaya, the great grandson of Yudhishtira, performed a great Yajna, in the course of which Vaishampāyana narrated the story at the request of the king. Later it was narrated by Sūta to an assembly of sages under the rishi Shaunaka, in the forest of Naimisha.

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CHAPTER I

ĀDI PARVA

(INTRODUCTION)

A. Early Genealogy:

While Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, belonged to the solar line of ancient Kshatriya rulers of India (Sūrya Vamśa), the heroes of the Mahābhārata belonged to the other great line (Lunar) of ancient kshatriyas (called the Lunar) (Chandra Vamśa).

Soma, the Moon God, the progenitor of the Lunar race, was the son of the noted sage, Ātri, the son of Brahmā. Among his successors was the great king, Yayāti, who had five sons. From two of these, Puru and Yadu, proceeded the well-known branches of the Lunar line. In the line of Yadu, Balarāma and Kṛishṇa were intimately associated with the events of Mahābhārata. In the other line, that of Puru, there was a king named Dushyanta, who married Shakuntalā. The son of Dushayanta was Bharata, a mighty ruler who made great conquests and after whose name India came to be known as Bhāratavarsha.

Among the successors of Bharata there was Hastina, who founded Hastināpur, and Kuru, after whose name Duryodhana and his brothers came to be called the Kauravas; though being descendants of Kuru (correctly speaking) the Pāndavas could also be called the Kauravas. The fourteenth from Bharata in the line was Shāntanu. The Mahābhārata was the family feud between his great grandsons.

B. Shāntanu and Gangā :

Gangā was the first wife of Shāntanu. She was the goddess Gangā of the river Gangā. Eight Vasus, the attendants of Indra, once annoyed sage Vashishtha, who cursed them, saying "Be born among men." Gangā agreed to become their human mother, promising that she would cast each one of the children born to her into the river Gangā immediately after birth, so that they could speedily regain their celestial form.

When Shāntanu met Gangā in the human form, he was greatly charmed by her beauty. Gangā agreed to marry him, on condition that if he spoke harshly or thwarted her in doing as she willed to do, she would leave him immediately.

Gangā gave birth to seven children, one by one, and destroyed them all, one by one, by



• चित्र यमन, दे. दून

1. Goddess Gangā revealed herself and presented Devavrata to Shāntanu, "This is your son; his name is Devavrata."

casting them immediately after birth into the river Gangā. Each time Shāntanu watched the gruesome action with horror but suffered in silence, mindful of the promise he had made to her prior to getting married. When the eighth child was born, the king could not hold his peace any longer and condemned his heartless wife, saying "How can you be so inhuman?" The marriage vow was broken and Gangā left Shāntanu, saying "My Lord, you have broken your promise. The time has come when I must leave you."

Sixteen years later, one day when Shāntanu was wandering along the bank of the river Gangā, he saw a child endowed with divine beauty. He was amusing himself by casting a volley of arrows across the river Gangā which was in floods, as if he was playing with an indulgent mother. The network of arrows so blocked the flow of the river that not a drop of water passed through.

Goddess Gangā revealed herself and presented the child to Shāntanu, saying, "This is your son, Satanāva. Take care of him. He has mastered the art of arms and is also well-versed in the scriptures." So saying, Gangā disappeared.

Satanāva was also called Devavrata. As the son of Gangā, he came to be known as Gāngeya. In the Mahābhārata, he is known as Bhīshma.

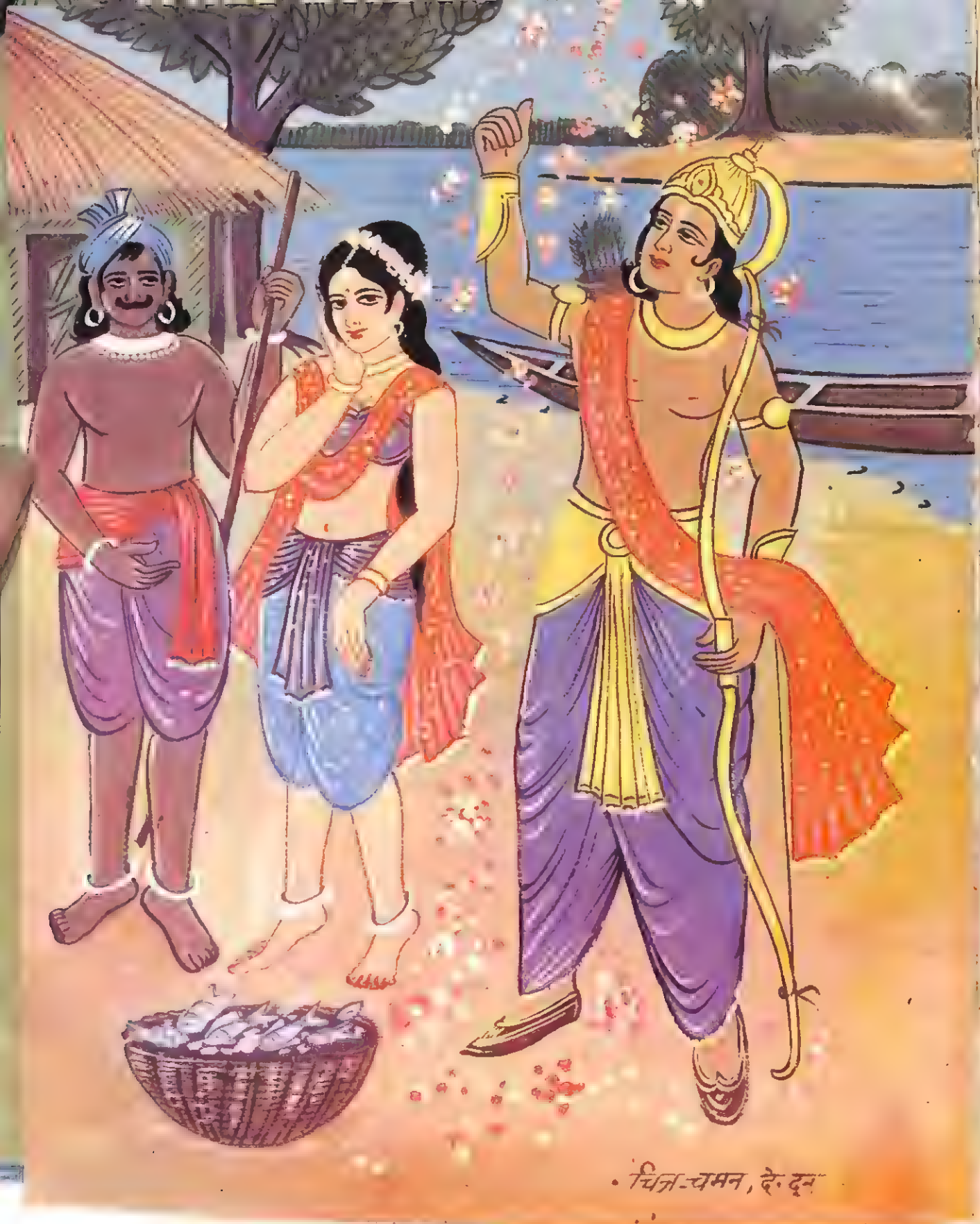
C. Shāntanu and Satyavatī: Devavrata's Vow :

Later, a few years after Gangā had presented Devavrata to Shāntanu as his own son, Shāntanu fell in love with the daughter of a fisherman, named Satyavatī.

Like Shakuntalā, Satyavatī had also a legendary origin. A fish carried two unborn babes, a boy and a girl, both children of a king. The fish was caught by a fisherman who, on opening it, found the two children. He handed over the boy to the king but kept the girl with him and brought her up as his daughter. This was Satyavatī.

A sage had conferred on her the boon that a divine fragrance would emanate from her body. As the air on that day was filled with that fragrance, the king traced it to that maiden and sought her hand.

When, however, Shāntanu asked the fisherman to give him the hand of his daughter, he would not agree, unless the king promised that the son born of her would be chosen to be the heir to the throne. Shāntanu, of course, could not agree to disinherit Devavrata. He returned to the palace but languished in silence due to his love for the fisherman's daughter. When Devavrata came to know of this, he approached the fisherman and assured him, saying, "You want your grandson to



चित्र-चमन, दे. दु.

2. Devavrata took the solemn vow: "I will never marry."

be the ruler after my father. So be it. I renounce my claims to the throne. Accept my word." The fisherman was amazed to hear these words but said he, "Your sons may contest the claims of my daughter's son." Quick came Devavrata's reply: "I take the vow that I will not marry. Let all hear the vow that I am taking. As long as life lasts in my body, I will not have kingship or married life or sons." This was a great sacrifice. It is said that gods from heaven showered flowers over the head of Devavrata, saying, "This one is Bhīshma." From that day onwards Devavrata was called Bhīshma, which signifies one who undertakes a terrible vow and fulfils it. Bhīshma lived a long life and was honoured by everyone. He was addressed as Pitāmaha (*Pater Familias*)

D. Descendants of Shāntanu and Satyavatī:

Before marriage with Shāntanu, once when Satyavatī was ferrying pilgrims across the Yamunā, the great sage, Pārāshara, going by the same boat, was moved by her beauty. The fisher-girl became the mother of a son, who came to be called Vyāsa. He was also called Kṛishṇa because of his swarthy complexion, and Dvaipāyana because he was brought up by Satyavatī on an island in the Yamunā.

Vyāsa bade farewell to his mother very early in his life and retired to the forest to spend his time in meditation. Before his departure, he said to his mother, "If ever you have need of me, think of me and I will come to your help."

Shāntanu had two sons by Satyavatī, named Chitrāngada and Vichitravīrya. Chitrāngada's reign was very brief and he was killed in a campaign. Vichitravīrya was a minor when he sat on the throne and Bhīshma had to act as his regent for several years. When Vichitravīrya became adolescent, Bhīshma set out in search of suitable wives for him.

The king of Kāshi had arranged a swayamavara for his three daughters. Bhīshma did not wait for the date of the swayamavara and forcibly took away all the three daughters in his chariot. Two of these three sisters, Ambikā and Ambālikā, were married to Vichitravīrya.

Out of the three sisters, the eldest, Ambā, pleaded before Bhīshma that she should be set free, as she had mentally chosen Salva, the king of Saubala, as her husband. Bhīshma permitted her to go to Salva, but when she went to Salva he refused to accept her. So she came back to Bhīshma and requested him to marry her. Bhīshma refused to break his vow of celibacy.

Ambā grew desperate and spent years in grief and rage and developed fierce hatred towards Bhīshma. She resorted to hard austerities and Lord Kumār gave her a garland of ever-fresh flowers, saying, “My child, whoever agrees to wear this garland around his neck should be able to kill Bhīshma.” But no kshatriya dared come forward to wear it and oppose Bhīshma. Ambā hung the garland at the gate of the palace of Drupada and retired to the forest once again. For years she again practised austerities. Ultimately Shiva gave her a boon that in her next birth she would slay Bhīshma. Impatient for that rebirth she prepared a pyre and plunged herself into the fire.

Ambā was reborn as the first off-spring of Drupada—a daughter. She wore the garland much against the wishes of her father. By the kindness of a yaksha, her sex was also changed. This half-male warrior, named Shikhandin, served as the cover to Arjuna in his fight against Bhīshma.

Unfortunately, Vichitravīrya also wasted away in sickness and died childless.

Thus, Vyāsa, Bhīshma, Chitrāngada and Vichitravīrya were half-brothers. Satyawatī, who was stricken with grief on the death of her two sons without leaving an heir to the throne, appealed to Bhīshma, saying, “Accept the two widows of my

son and raise up sons to rule the kingdom. You must not let the Kuru dynasty die out." Bhīshma refused to break his vow. Said he, "Mother, you are aware of the pledge I have taken. I will abandon the three worlds, the kingdom of the Devas and anything superior to them; but, in no case, Truth. The earth may lose its smell, water its taste, fire its appearance, the sun its brilliance, Dharma Devatā Dharma, but I cannot abandon Truth. I will rather lose my life."

Satyavatī then thought of Vyāsa and he accepted the request of his mother.

E. Dhṛitrāshtra, Pāndu and Vidura:

When Vyāsa approached Ambikā, she closed her eyes tight with horror and she had a son, named Dhṛitrāshtra, who was blind. Ambalikā turned pale with fright on seeing Vyāsa and her son, Pāndu, had pale complexion.

Satyavatī, then, begged Vyāsa to become the father of a third son, who should be without any defect. Ambalikā, whom her mother-in-law wanted to have another child, sent a slave girl, dressed in her own clothes, to Vyāsa. This girl became the mother of Vidura, said to be the incarnation of Dharma, god of justice.

Thus Dhṛitarāshtra, Pāndu and Vidura, being the sons of Vyāsa, the author of the Mahābhārata, were brothers. While Vyāsa retired to the forest for meditation thereafter, Bhishma had to undertake once more the responsibility for bringing up Dhṛitarāshtra, Pāndu and Vidura, till they were of age to rule over Hastināpur.

When the time came to place one of the two princes, Dhṛitrāshtra and Pāndu, on the throne, claims of the elder one, Dhṛitrāshtra, were passed over because of his blindness. The second brother, Pāndu, therefore, ascended the throne. Vidura was passed over because of his humble birth.

Dhṛitrāshtra married Gāndhārī, the daughter of the king of Gāndhāra, named Subala. When she came to know that her future husband was blind, from that very moment, out of devotion for him, she denied to herself the advantage of eyesight which her husband did not have and covered her eyes with a fold of cloth and always came blindfolded in his presence.

Pāndu married two wives—Prithā, better known as Kuntī, and Mādri. Kuntī chose king Pāndu at the swayamavara held by her father. Mādri was the sister of Shalya, the king of Mādra, who was prevailed upon to bestow his sister in

marriage upon Pāndu in return for large sums of money, jewellery, elephants and horses.

Pāndu was a great warrior and undertook a great campaign to subjugate the neighbouring kingdoms. The kingdom of Hastināpur prospered under him.

One day, Pāndu went out a-hunting. A sage and his wife were sporting in the guise of deer. Pāndu shot down the male deer with an arrow. While dying, the sage thus cursed Pāndu, "Sinner, you will also meet death, when, overcome with love, you approach your wife."

Pāndu was heart-broken on hearing this curse. He turned his mind away from worldly pleasures and he decided to live a life of renunciation. Entrusting the kingdom to Bhīshma and Vidura, Pāndu retreated to the forest along with his two wives and began to live a life of perfect abstinence. As ill luck would have it, after spending eighteen years in celibacy, one day, in the spring season, Pāndu forgot the curse and, despite Mādri's protests, broke his vow of abstinence. The curse of the sage took effect immediately and he fell dead. Mādri burnt herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

The sages of the forest brought the bereaved and grief-stricken Kuntī with the five Pāndava

brothers to Hastināpur and entrusted them to Bhīshma. Yudhishtira, at that time, was about sixteen years of age. The whole capital was plunged into sorrow. Ambālikā's grief was inconsolable. Bhīshma, Dhṛitrāshtra and Vidura performed the funeral rites of Pāndu.

Dhṛitrāshtra then ascended the throne with Bhīshma once again acting as the Regent, until the eldest of the princes should come of age.

Vyāsa said to Satyawatī, "Mother, dreadful times are in store for the Kuru dynasty. Retire to the forest and turn your back upon the world." The three aged queens, Satyawatī and her two daughters-in-law, Ambikā and Ambālikā, spent the rest of their life in a hermitage in the forest and thus spared themselves the sorrows and sufferings faced by the coming generation.

F. The Royal Rivals—The Pāndavas and the Kauravas:

While Pāndu had five sons, three by Kuntī and two by Mādri, Dhṛitrāshtra had one hundred and one sons and one daughter.

a. The Birth of the Pāndavas:

There is an account of the supernatural birth of the five Pāndava brothers.

Prithā, better known as Kuntī, the mother of the five Pāndavas, was said to be of celestial origin. She was adopted by a Yadava prince, Sūra, the grandfather of Kṛishṇa, who gave her to his childless cousin, Kuntibhoj. Hence, she came to be called Kuntī.

Before Kuntī's marriage, once sage Durvāsā stayed at the palace of her father and she looked after him with great care and devotion. Pleased with her conduct, sage Durvāsā imparted her a divine charm (mantra), by virtue of which she could have a child by any god she liked to call in her presence. One day, just out of curiosity, she invoked the Sun God and so Karṇa was born, equipped with celestial ear-rings and an invulnerable armour which grew in size as the wearer grew. Kuntī, out of her maidenly fear, placed the child in a basket and set it afloat on a river. It was found by a charioteer, named Ādhiratha, who had no son and was brought up by his wife, named Rādhā. Karṇa was, therefore, called Rādheya.

After marriage with Pāndu, as Pāndu had taken the vow of celibacy, he was anxious as to how he could have sons. Kuntī, with his permission, made use of the charm given by Durvāsā. She had thus three sons by three deities—Yudhishtira by Dharma, god of justice

Bhīma by Vāyu, god of wind, and Arjuna by Indra, god of gods. Mādri who was equally keen to have her own children was also permitted by Kuntī to use the same charm. Mādri thought of the two Āshwins and thus Nakula and Sahadeva were born.

b. The Birth of the Kauravas :

One day sage Vyāsa was hospitably entertained by Gāndhārī and in return he granted her a boon. She chose to be the mother of one hundred sons. After two years she produced a mass of flesh which was divided by Vyāsa into one hundred and one pieces as big as the joint of a thumb. From those, in course of time, were born a hundred sons and a daughter, named Dushshāla.

It is said that at the birth of Duryodhana, evil omens took place: jackals yelled, asses brayed, whirlwind blew and the sky seemed to be on fire. Vidura and brāhmaṇas advised Dhṛitrāshtra to abandon the child, saying, "To cast him away is the only remedy. To sacrifice one individual for the sake of a family is not against Dharma." It was, of course, not easy for Dhṛitrāshtra to accept such an advice.

Dhṛitrāshtra had a son, named Yuyutsu, by a non-kshatriya woman also.

c. The Early Life of the Princes :

All the princes, the Pāndavas and the Kauravas, were brought up together in the royal palace at Hastināpur under the benign care of Bhīshma, who loved all of them equally without any distinction.

As the princes grew, they were trained together in the princely games and sports and art and science of arms, as befitting Kshatriya princes. Although no favours were shown to one cousin over another, the two groups of princes—the Kauravas and the Pāndavas—right from the beginning, failed to pull on amicably. On the whole, the Pāndava brothers seemed to fare better and this created a feeling of jealousy in the minds of the Kauravas, headed by Duryodhana. The Kauravas were unhappy, in particular, with Bhīma who was almost a bully and would often beat them, pull them by the hair or plunge them into a pond and then hold them under water till they felt suffocated. Duryodhana nursed a deep hatred for Bhīma and once even tried to kill him by mixing some poison in his food. When Bhīma fell into a swoon and seemed to be dead, Duryodhana bound his hands and feet and cast him into the river. Bhīma was not drowned, but descended to the abode of the Nāgas, where the serpents attacked

him. Their poison countered the poison administered to him by Duryodhana and he regained consciousness. In the realm of the serpents, the king of the Nāgas gave Bhīma a liquid to drink which endowed him with great strength and vigour.

When Duryodhana saw Bhīma alive later, his hatred and jealousy for Bhīma in particular, and for the Pāndavas in general, increased all the more. He and his brothers devised all sorts of schemes for harming the Pāndava cousins, but they never succeeded.

d. The Mahābhārata—an Allegory: the Struggle between the Noble and the Ignoble:

The Mahābhārata is considered to be an allegory, in which the Kauravas, as a symbol of the evil in the human nature, are at war right from the very beginning, with the Pāndavas, an embodiment of the noble principles in life.

The characteristics of the five Pāndavas have been drawn with artistic delicacy and the same consistency has been maintained throughout the epic poem. The eldest of the Pāndavas, Yudhishthira, is a symbol of the ideals of justice, truth and righteousness. He is also called Dharmaputra. Bhīma is a symbol of courage and strength,

and being of huge structure, he is ferocious and cruel at times. Arjuna is known for his excellence as a warrior, being matchless in archery. Nakula and Sahadeva are amiable and noble-minded. All of them are persons of saintly virtues, noble qualities and exemplary character.

On the other hand, the hundred sons of Dhṛitrāshtra are represented as mean, unprincipled and dishonourable. Duryodhana has been painted in the darkest colours, as the very embodiment of greed, jealousy, deceit, falsehood and evil-mindedness.

Both, the Kaurava and the Pāndava princes, were thus diametrically opposed to each other in character. It became a life-long struggle between Dharma and Adharma—righteousness and unrighteousness.

e. Droṇāchārya—the Tutor of the Princes :

It is strange indeed that the two groups of princes, so uncongenial in character, were educated together under the same teachers, first under Kripāchārya and later under Droṇāchārya.

Droṇāchārya was the son of a brāhmaṇa sage, named Bhāradwāja. He is supposed to have a miraculous birth, being the son of a nymph.

Drupada, the son of king of Pāṇchāla, was a

fellow-student of Droṇa in the hermitage of his father, Bhāradwāja. There grew up a generous intimacy between the two and it was fondly hoped that they would remain warm friends throughout their lives, but fate parted them.

Drupada, being the son of a king, ascended the throne of Pāṇchāla after his father's death. Droṇa, after completing the study of the religious scriptures, as befitting a brāhmaṇa, became interested in the art of archery. Later in life, he learnt the use of weapons from Parashurāma and became an unrivalled master of the military art, worthy to be a teacher in any princely house. Meanwhile, Droṇa also married the sister of Kṛipāchārya and had a son.

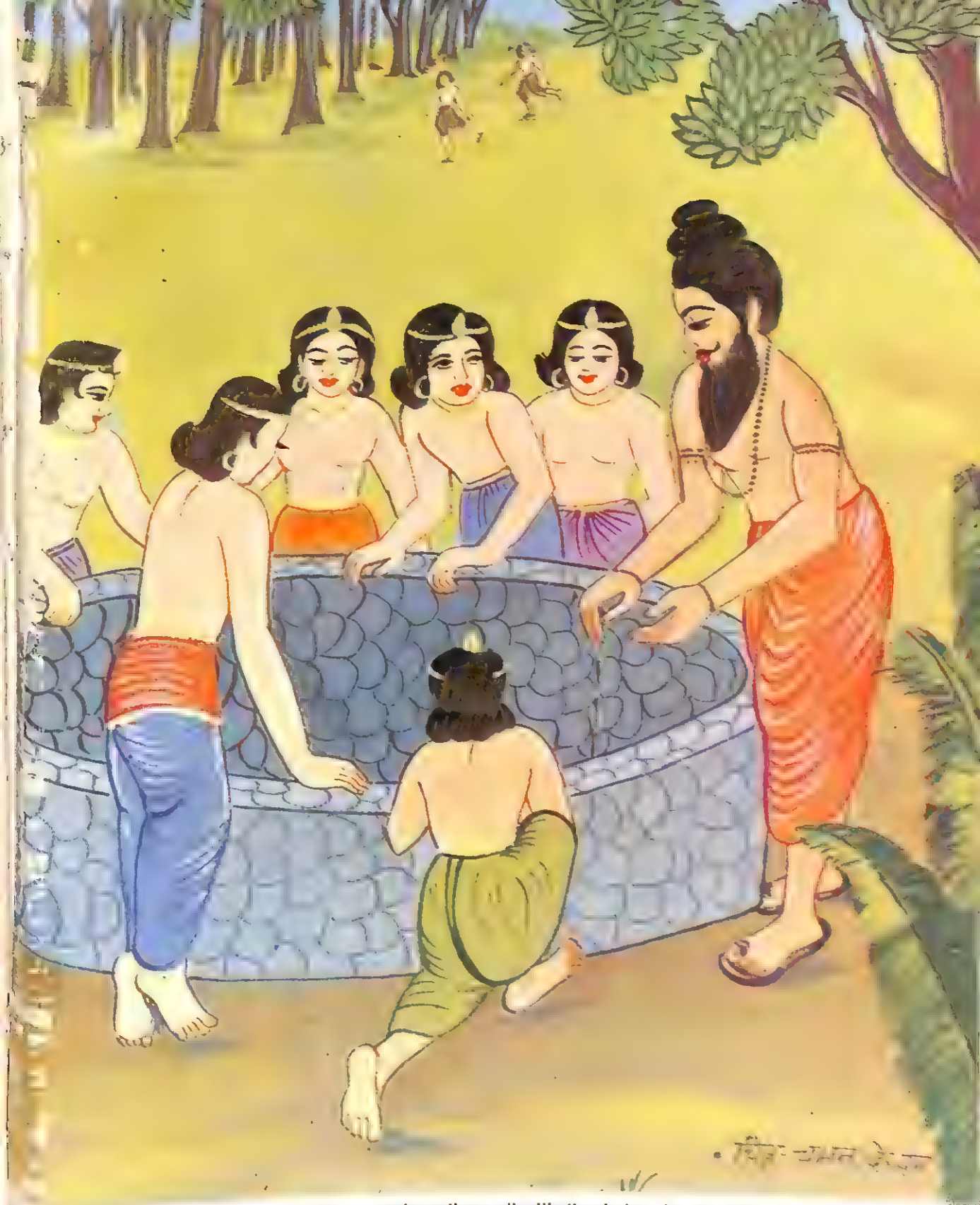
As Droṇa was not well off financially, he decided to pay a visit to his old friend, Drupada, who, being drunk with power, did not receive him well and even spoke harsh words. Said Drupada to Droṇa, "What friendship can there be between a luckless beggar and a mighty king! True, a bond united us in the days of youth but it has wasted away during the course of years. Friendship can exist only between the equals, as we were once. Forget the past." Droṇa abruptly left the court of Drupada, but not before making a mental vow to punish the arrogant king one day.

Droṇa then turned his steps towards Hastināpur, where his wife's brother, Kṛipāchārya, was the tutor of the royal princes. One day it so happened that, while the princes were playing with a ball outside the city, the ball as well as the ring of Yudhishtira fell into a well. The princes just stood confused and non-plussed. Droṇa, who chanced to pass by that side, smiled and remarked: "You are princes trained in the use of bow and arrow. I am surprised at your helplessness." Then he showed how the ball and the ring could be taken out of the well.

Picking up a blade of grass he propelled it as an arrow and it stuck the ball. Then he sent a number of blades in succession, which, clinging together, formed a chain and Drona pulled out the ball.

Next, borrowing a bow, he sent an arrow right into the ring. The arrow rebounded and brought up the ring.

The princes spoke about the brāhmaṇa and the event to their grandsire, Bhīshma. Droṇa was received well at the court and appointed the instructor for the princes in the art of weaponry. Bhīshma was confident that under the supervision of Droṇa, the princes would receive the right type of education.



3. Dronāchārya taking out the ball from the well with the help of arrows. Kaurava and Pāndava princes looking on with surprise.

Yudhishtira received training as a spearman, Arjuna surpassed all in skill as an archer, Bhīma in wielding a club, Nakula in training horses and Sahadeva in swordsmanship. The Kaurava princes were also very wise and brave but, on the whole, the Pāndava princes proved to be superior to the Kauravas.

G. THE TOURNAMENT:

When all the princes had gained high proficiency as accomplished warriors, Droṇāchārya addressed the blind ruler, saying, “O mighty king, your sons and nephews have attained great skill in the use of arms. It is time to test their skill.” King Dhṛitrāshtra issued instructions to hold a tournament for the display of the martial skill by all the princes in the presence of the elders and the common people.

a. The Preparation:

Droṇāchārya, accompanied by Vidura, selected a wide and plain ground on which the youthful cousins, the Pāndavas and the Kauravas, were to display their skill in archery, in sword, spear and club exercises, and in the management of chariots, elephants and horses.

On the day of the tournament, vast multitudes of spectators, from all parts of the kingdom, assembled to cheer up the combatants. Flags and garlands adorned the entire enclosure and trophies of war were displayed prominently. A large altar was made beside a stream for offering sacrifices to the gods.

The clarion notes of the instruments of war proclaimed the arrival of the king, who was led to the throne. With him arrived Gāndhārī, the mother of Kauravas, and Kuntī, the mother of the Pāndavas. Then followed the counsellors of the king, led by Bhīshma and Vidura. The trumpets sounded loud and the agitation of the vast assembly of the people was 'like the roar of a mighty ocean.'

White-haired Droṇāchārya arrived dressed in white robes with white sandals and white garlands around his neck. His son, Ashwatthāmā, followed him as 'the red planet Mars follows the White Moon in the heavens.' The saintly instructor offered sacrifices to the gods, to the accompaniment of the chanting of the mantras from the holy scriptures.

The heralds sounded their trumpets, as the youthful princes arrived in bright costumes, wearing plates, carrying bows and swords, with

quivers slung from their shoulders, and their arms bound with leather. All the princes paid due respects to the teacher and the elders and awaited the former's command.

b. The Display :

One by one, the princes got up and displayed their skill at arms, while the spectators watched the show with breathless interest and applauded the warrior princes. Bhīshma, sitting on the right of the throne, watched the tournament with delight and full satisfaction, while Vidura, sitting on the left side, narrated the events to the blind king. Kuntī narrated to blindfolded Gāndhārī all that took place in the arena.

The princes shot arrows at targets, on foot and mounted on horses. They rode on horses, elephants and chariots and their arrows hit the targets with wonderful accuracy. Later in the day, the princes engaged in mimic combats. The royal rivals moved fast, fearless in action and skilled in powerful thrusts. Swords clamoured on shields and huge maces were wielded. The mimic combat between Duryodhana and Bhīma was fought with more than mimic fury and they had to be drawn apart by the elders. The other princes also fought as if it was real warfare. Often Droṇa had to intervene, bidding the combatants to withdraw.

Lastly, Droṇa summoned Arjuna for a special demonstration. As he came forward, clad in a golden armour, the people hailed him with joy. Arjuna performed wonders with his magic arms, creating fire with the Āgneya weapons, water with the Varuṇa weapons, and so on. At the end he caused all these to disappear with the Antardhyāna weapon.

Arjuna shot five arrows simultaneously into the gaping jaws of a revolving iron boar and twenty-one arrows into the hollow of a cow's horn suspended by a string, with unerring accuracy. Heaven and earth resounded with the applause of the people. Only Duryodhana's heart burned with jealousy because of the triumph achieved by Arjuna. His brow was dark with envy and hate.

By the evening it seemed that the tournament had ended peacefully. The crowds began to melt away. All of a sudden, loud din of weapons and clank of armour were heard. The crowds looked towards the entrance to the enclosure and they saw an unknown warrior entering the arena.

c. The Unknown Warrior :

This 'unknown warrior' was Karṇa, the son of Sūrya (Sun God), and of Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇdavas. He was, however, known as Rādheya,

as Rādhā, the wife of Ādhiratha, a charioteer, had brought him up. Karna was clad in a golden armour and wore celestial ear-rings. In the words of the poet, he was 'an elephant in his fury, a lion in his wrath, fearless and proud, dauntless and self-possessed.'

Karna paid homage to Drona rather haughtily and announced that he could perform all those feats that had been performed by Arjuna that evening, if he was permitted by Drona to do so. Drona gave the necessary permission to the warrior who performed each feat which had won applause for Arjuna on that great day. Duryodhana embraced Karna and addressed him as 'brother'. Karna then challenged Arjuna to a combat. This moved Arjuna to great wrath and he ridiculed the unknown warrior. Karna answered back with pride but calmly, "Waste not words, Arjuna. The field of combat is free to all warriors. They enter by their valour and they win their places by their skill. Wrathful speech is the weapon of the cowards."

Drona lost temper and commanded Arjuna to accept the challenge. The two warriors, Karna and Arjuna, prepared for a real combat and not for a mimic one. Indra guarded his son, Arjuna, while

Sūrya took care of his son, Karṇa. The spectators watched with suspense.

Kṛipāchārya, the foster-brother of Bhīshma, performed the duties of the herald for this combat. According to tradition, each combatant was required to announce his name and his pedigree. Kṛipāchārya proclaimed Arjuna as one of the great line of Bharata, the son of Pāndu and Kuntī. Then he turned to Karṇa and asked him to announce his name and his lineage. It was necessary because there could be a combat only between those who were equal in rank.

Karṇa heard Kṛipāchārya, but stood still. Duryodhana noticed Karṇa's discomfiture and cried out, "Valour is not reckoned by birth, but by deeds. I proclaim Karṇa as the king of Anga." Then he led Karṇa by the hand and placed him on a throne, while the brāhmaṇas chanted mantras and annointed him as a king. Thereafter, Duryodhana and Karṇa embraced each other to confirm their friendship.

Meanwhile, a charioteer arrived there—an old wearied person, leaning upon a staff and rejoicing in his heart on seeing his son so honoured among the princes. Karṇa immediately knelt down and touched his feet. The Pāndava brothers looked amused and puzzled; they

murmured, "Here is the son of a charioteer! How dare he seek combat with a kshatriya prince?" Karṇa grew pale with wrath, though he had no words to utter.

Duryodhana remarked: "Do not insult a mighty hero. A hero is known by his performance. The proudest warrior should be prepared for a combat against the most humble."

Meanwhile, it became dark. The king and his counsellors, Droṇa and his pupils, all departed in silence. The spectators also departed slowly. Some remarked: "Arjuna has triumphed", while others whispered: "No, Karṇa has won."

Duryodhana walked by the side of Karṇa. He had won a friend to match Arjuna's valour in future.

The poet tells us that Indra, the god-father of Arjuna, feared that one day there would be a grim contest between his son, Arjuna, and Karṇa. He, therefore, put on the garb of a brāhmaṇa and, coming to Karṇa, begged of him his ear-rings and armour. Karṇa, known for never having refused to give away any gift that was asked of him, immediately cut off his armour and ear-rings with which he was born and gave them to the brāhmaṇa. Indra was so pleased with Karṇa that he bade him ask for a boon. Karṇa requested Indra to give him

Shakti, the powerful weapon to kill enemies. Indra had no other alternative but to give Shakti to Karna, but he did so on one condition: "You can use this weapon only against one enemy and, after killing him, the weapon will come back to me."

Karna was keen to keep this weapon reserved for his fight against Arjuna, but during the Mahābhārata war he had to use it for killing Ghatotkacha, the brave son of Bhīma. Thus, Arjuna was luckily spared.

d. Droṇāchārya and Guru-Dakshinā :

The tournament showed that the royal princes, both the Pāndavas and the Kauravas, had attained high proficiency in the use of arms. Their teacher, Droṇa, naturally asked for the usual guru-dakshinā. He commanded his pupils to march against Drupada, the king of Pāñchāla, and bring him captive in his presence.

The Pāndavas and the Kauravas could not have agreed on a joint campaign against Drupada. The Kauravas, led by Duryodhana, were the first to attack Drupada, but they were repulsed by the forces of Drupada. Then, the Pāndavas marched against Drupada and brought him captive in the presence of their teacher.

Droṇa said to Drupada, "I have not forgotten

that in our boyhood, we have been good friends and have studied together under the same teacher. I seek your friendship even today and give you half of your kingdom which is now mine through conquest.”

At these sarcastic remarks, Drupada felt greatly hurt and resolved to avenge his defeat some day. He undertook to perform a yajna and out of the sacrificial fire were born two children—a son, named Dhṛishtadyumna, and a daughter, named Draupadī. Draupadī became the wife of the Pāndavas, while Dhṛishtadyumna commanded the forces of the Pāndavas on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

H. YUDHISHTHIRA AS THE HEIR-APPARENT :

It was at this stage that Dhṛitrāshtra installed Yudhishtira as his heir-apparent. He would have very much loved to see his eldest son, Duryodhana, appointed as the heir-apparent, but it was not possible. Yudhishtira was senior to Duryodhana in age. He was also more popular among the people. Moreover, Bhīshma, Droṇa, Vidura and others were all eloquent in the praise of Yudhishtira.

Further, on the death of Pāndu, Dhritrashtra had ascended the throne with Bhīshma acting as

the Regent, until the eldest of the Pāṇḍava princes came of age, as Yudhishtira was only sixteen at that time.

The Pāṇḍu prince soon won the affection of the citizens, though it excited the jealousy of Duryodhana. The people of the kingdom would often flock together and demand that as Dhṛitrāshtra was blind and Bhīshma, the Regent, very old, it was time that Yudhishtira should be crowned as the king immediately. Such demands of the people caused great unhappiness to Duryodhana, who consulted Karṇa, his brothers and his maternal uncle, Shakuni, to devise ways and means to remove Yudhishtira out of the way and to secure the throne for himself. He often approached his father and complained bitterly against the talk in the public: "If Yudhishtira is to succeed to the throne, where do we come in? After Yudhishtira, his son and then his son's son will be the kings. We will only sink in poverty and continue to be dependent upon the Pāṇḍavas." Dhṛitrāshtra tried to pacify him by arguing, "Yudhishtira is a man of virtue. If we try to oppose him, we will only antagonise the people who may rebel." Duryodhana remonstrated and said, "I do not recognise Yudhishtira's superiority in any way. If I do not get my share in the affairs of the

government of the kingdom, I will end my life.” Dhritrāshtra always advised Duryodhana to have patience.

Several counsellors at the court of Dhritrāshtra, especially Kanika, the minister of Shakuni, tried to poison the mind of the old king. They would suggest in a subtle manner: “A strong enemy should be destroyed by means of strategem and even a weak enemy should not be ignored. Destroy your enemy by whatever means it is possible for you—in secret or openly, by curses or by bribing some one.”

I. THE PĀNDAVAS' VISIT TO VARANĀVATA:

Dhritrāshtra, who was a weak-willed king, ultimately yielded to his son's evil counsel. Duryodhana suggested that the king should somehow prevail upon the Pāndavas to go for some time to Varanāvata, to see the beauty of the place and to participate in a festival. Varanāvata had been a famous place because King Harisha Chandra had stayed there during the days of adversity. Duryodhana thought to himself that in the meantime he would be able to win over, through gifts and honours, the goodwill of the people who were influential in the kingdom.

The unsuspecting Pāndavas were easily persuaded, especially as the suggestion had come from their uncle. The Pāndava brothers bade farewell to Dhṛitarāshtra and others and left Hastināpur, along with their mother, Kuntī, amidst tears and regrets of the common people.

a. Duryodhana's Plot : The Wax Palace :

When Yudhishtira agreed to go to Varanāvata for some time, Duryodhana lost no time in sending a trusted friend of his, Purochana by name, to Varanāvata, to construct a house for the reception of the Pāndava princes. This house was made of combustible materials, such as hemp, resin and lac and its walls were plastered with mortar containing oil, fat and lac. It was planned that one day while the princes would be asleep, the house would be set on fire.

However, at the time of their departure, Vidura, who had some idea of the sinful plans of Duryodhana, spoke to Yudhishtira in secret, bidding him to be aware of the perils of fire. Said he, "He alone can escape from danger, who forestalls the evil intentions of the enemy."

On arrival at Varanāvata, Yudhishtira closely examined the house and became convinced that it was meant to be a deathtrap for them. With the

assistance of a miner who was later sent by Vidura, an underground tunnel was constructed for a quiet escape from the house one day.

b. The Pāṇḍavas' Counter-plot :

The Pāṇḍavas then devised a counter-plot. One evening, Kuntī gave a dinner in the house to the poor people of the town. A poor Bhil woman, with her five sons, drank heavily and just slumbered there. That very night, Bhīma set fire to the house and in no time it was reduced to ashes. The woman with her five sons perished in the fire. Purochana and his servants also perished. While it was supposed that Kuntī and her five sons had perished in the conflagration, the latter made swift their escape by the underground tunnel.

In Hastināpur, Dhṛitarāshtra pretended to be grief-stricken. Vidura also mourned along with others, though he knew the truth. Bhīshma was genuinely unhappy at the 'sad happening', but Vidura took him aside and gave him the correct picture. Bhīshma was struck dumb with surprise and shock to learn of the evil plan, but praised Vidura for his far-sightedness and right action in time. How Dhṛitrāshtra must have undergone mental agony has been beautifully described by Vyāsa : "Just as the water of a deep pool is cool at

they were to take shelter in the house of a brāhmaṇa. Hidimbī bade them farewell with tears in her eyes. Ghatotkacha promised to come to the help of the Pāṇdavas, whenever they needed him.

At Ekachakra, the five brothers went out every day to beg for food. Whatever they brought home in the evening was divided by Kuntī into two portions—one half she gave to wolf-bellied Bhīma and the other half was kept for herself and the other four brothers.

b. Slaying of Bakāsura by Bhīma :

While residing in the house of that poor brāhmaṇa, Bhīma saved the members of his family and all other people of the town from a terrible giant, named Bakāsura. Every day the citizens of Ekachakra were required to send by turn to the giant huge quantities of food, including a cartload of rice, and two bullocks. The giant devoured these and also the man who conveyed the meals to him. One morning Kuntī heard the lamentations from the members of the family of the brāhmaṇa host, as it happened to be the turn of that family.

Kuntī, out of compassion, offered to send Bhīma to slay the demon. Bhīma collected rice and drove the bullock-cart towards the forest. On reaching the appointed site, Bhīma started taking

food himself, while calling bad names to the demon. Finding Bhīma eating the food which was meant for him, Bakāsura got terribly annoyed. A combat soon followed, in which the demon was killed. His follower demons took the vow never to eat human flesh again or to oppress the people of the town. Bhīma dragged the dead body of Bakāsura to the gates of the city, and that was his end.

K. DRAUPADI'S SWAYAMAVARA:

While the Pāndavas were still living in disguise as brāhmaṇas at Ekachakra, news arrived of the swayamavara of Draupadi, the daughter of Drupada, the king of Pāñchāla. The Pāndava brothers decided to go to Pāñchāla and win Draupadi. As a large number of brāhmaṇas were also going to Pāñchāla to witness the swayamavara and receive gifts, the Pāndavas easily got mingled with them in the guise of brāhmaṇas. Kuntī also accompanied them. At Pāñchāla they stayed in the house of a potter as ordinary brāhmaṇas.

a. The Assembly of the Princes :

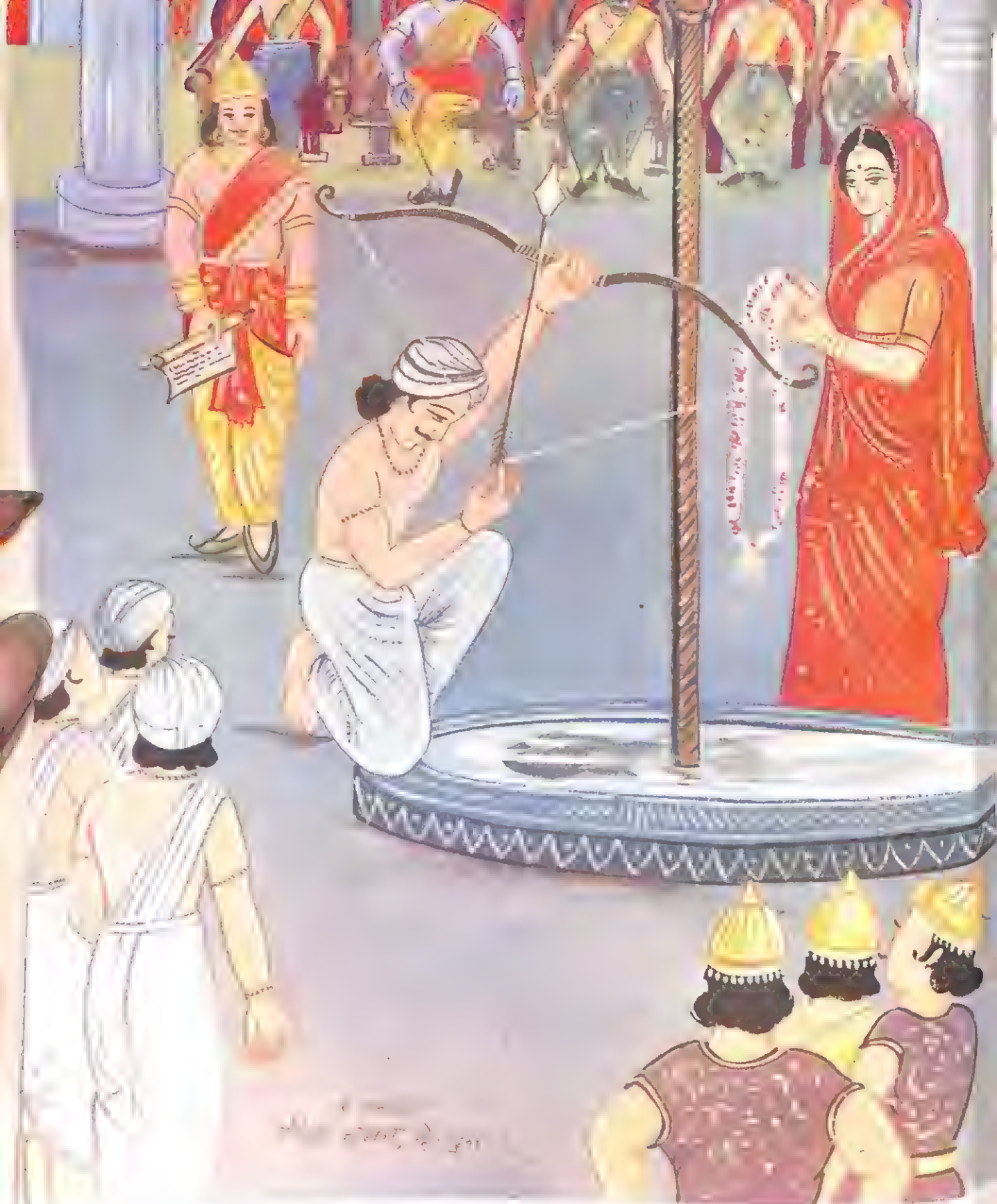
A large number of princely suitors had gathered in Pāñchāla for the swayamavara. King

Drupada got a huge bow prepared for the occasion, which he thought that none except Arjuna could bend and string. For the target, a huge pole was erected and it was surmounted by a golden fish that was poised above a swiftly revolving wheel.

On the day of the swayamavara, the bow was brought to the assembly hall. Draupadī also arrived carrying the bridal garland. Trumpets were sounded and the brāhmaṇas chanted mantras. Drupada's son, Dhṛishtadyumna, read out the proclamation of his father, announcing that he would give away his daughter to anyone who could, by means of that bow, shoot an arrow through the revolving ring into the target. Each competitor was allowed only five arrows and the fish was to be shot on an eye to be brought down.

Among the royal suitors, there were the sons of Dhṛitrāshtra, Karna, Shishupāla, Shalya, Jarāsandha and others. Kṛishṇa also arrived just to watch the swayamavara. The Pāndavas, still disguised as brāhmaṇas, stood among the holy men.

Most of the princes came forward one after another and tried to string the bow, but all of them failed. Shishupāla, Jarāsandha, Shalya and Duryodhana were among the unsuccessful



4. Draupadi's Swayamvara—Arjuna shot an arrow through the revolving wheel into the target and the golden fish fell down on the ground.

aspirants for the hand of Draupadi. Karṇa would have succeeded, but Draupadī refused to have the son of a charioteer as a suitor for herself. When none of the kshatriya princes succeeded in bending and stringing the bow, there was loud clamour and many suitors remarked that an impossible test had been put up just to humiliate the princes.

b. Arjuna won the Contest :

Then Arjuna advanced still disguised as a brāhmaṇa. The kshatriya princes were perplexed and wondered how a weakly brāhmaṇa could try to accomplish a feat which had been beyond the strength of mighty kshatriya princes. Arjuna walked around the bow, addressed a prayer to the gods, bent the bow and stringed it. Then he fixed an arrow on it and, without any effort, shot an arrow through the revolving wheel into the target. The golden fish fell down on the ground.

The heart of Draupadī was filled with ecstasy; she advanced towards Arjuna and flung the bridal garland around his neck. Drupada was also happy for he guessed, and guessed rightly, that the winner could be none other than Arjuna in the garb of a brāhmaṇa.

However, the event created an uproar in the assembly hall. When the kshatriya suitors found that a brāhmaṇa had outdone them all, their wrath knew no bounds. A free fight seemed imminent. Karṇa rushed at Arjuna, but when he was struck by Arjuna, he faltered and fell down. "O brāhmaṇa, are you a god in human disguise? No brāhmaṇa could have thus valiantly attacked me," said Karṇa. Madra's king, Shalya, advanced towards Bhīma who ultimately threw him heavily on the ground, where he lay unconscious. Other princes drew back humbled and humiliated on seeing the sad plight of Karṇa and Shalya. All of them wondered who that brahman could be. The Pāṇdavas, however, refused to disclose their identity. Kṛishṇa, who alone knew that the brāhmaṇas in disguise were none other than the Pāṇdavas, tried to pacify the kshatriyas.

c. Draupadī married to the Five Pāṇdavas :

Meanwhile, the Pāṇdava brothers returned to the house of the potter with Draupadī. King Drupada, still not very sure about the identity of the person who had won his daughter, sent his son, Dhṛishtadyumna, to find out the truth. He followed the Pāṇdava brothers quietly and, standing outside the house of the potter, listened

to the conversation inside the house, and was happy to know that the brāhmaṇas were only the Pāṇḍava brothers.

The five Pāṇḍavas, on entering the house, addressed their mother, saying, "What a great gift have we brought today!" Kuntī, being inside the house and fancying that the sons, as usual, have only brought some alms, said, "Then share it among yourself." When Yudhishtira told the mother that the gift was Draupadī, whom Arjuna had won at the swāyamavara, Kuntī was non-plussed but the fateful (fatal) words had been spoken.

Next morning, Drupada sent a messenger inviting the five brothers, their mother and Draupadī to the palace. When the people saw the Pāṇḍavas with their royal gait, they knew that they were not brāhmaṇas but high-born kshatriyas. Drupada was happy to learn that Arjuna had won his daughter, but he was unhappy to learn that, honouring the words of Kuntī, the Pāṇḍavas had planned to marry Draupadī jointly.

At the persuasion of Vyāsa, who arrived there and who acquainted everyone with the divinely-ordained destiny of Draupadī, all of them, including Drupada, accepted that she be the wife of all the five Pāṇḍavas. She was first married to

Yudhishtira and then to others according to their seniority in age.

d. The Panic in Hastināpur :

News arrived in Hastināpur that the Pāndavas had not perished in the wax palace at Varanāvata and that they were very much alive, that the brāhmaṇa who had won Draupadī in the swayamavara was Arjuna and that the Pāndavas were the sons-in-law of Drupada, the king of Pāṇchāla. No news could have been more disturbing than this for Dhṛitrāshtra and his sons.

Vidura went to Dhṛitrāshtra and said, "The children of the clan of Kuru are prospering; the daughter of Drupada has become our daughter-in-law." Dhṛitrāshtra thought that Duryodhana, who had gone for the swayamavara of Draupadī, had won her. With great excitement, he said to Vidura, "How pleased am I! Call Draupadī in our presence; give her a joyous welcome." Vidura hastened to correct the mistake and said, "The Pāndavas are alive and Arjuna has won Draupadī in the swayamavara. The five Pāndavas have married Draupadī jointly and they are happy at Pāṇchāla." At heart Dhṛitrāshtra was shocked to hear that the Pāndavas were alive but, outwardly just to please Vidura, he said, "How delighted am I

to hear that the Pāṇdavas are alive. Your nectar-like words have given me extreme joy. I love no one else as I love the Pāṇdavas, the sons of my brother. It is good that Draupadī is our daughter-in-law.” Duryodhana not annoyed on hearing Dhṛitrāshtra speaking like this. Said he to his father, “By praising the Pāṇdavas in the presence of Vidura, you are doing me a great harm.” Dhṛitrāshtra said in reply, “I would love to do as you think, but I should not let Vidura know my mind.”

Thereafter, Duryodhana almost lost his senses. He only thought of nursing crooked schemes to bring about the fall of the Pāṇdavas: “Can we not create differences among the Pāṇdavas over possession of Draupadī? Can we not bribe Drupada with gifts and win him over to our cause? Can we not influence Draupadī against all the Pāṇdava brothers or at least against some of them? Should we try to kill Bhīma, who is the strongest of the five?” Karṇa laughed at Duryodhana’s evil strategy, for, personally, he was opposed to such dishonourable actions which would also not prove effective in any way. He had only one solution—a surprise attack on the Pāṇdavas and Drupada before they became stronger through alliance. Dhṛitrāshtra could not

make up his mind. Though he seemed to support Karṇa's plans, he thought it better to call forth a council of the elders and to act upon their advice.

Bhīshma was extremely happy to learn that the Pāṇdavas were alive and were guests of Drupada as his sons-in-law. With his deep understanding of such political problems, he said to Dhṛitrāshtra, "The Pāṇdavas and the Kauravas both are equally dear to me. The Pāṇdavas have as much right over the ancient kingdom of the Kurus as your sons have. It is good that Kuntī and her sons are alive. The fire incident at Varanāvata had tarnished your image among the people. God has given you an opportunity to wipe off that stigma on your name. You should invite the Pāṇdavas and hand them over half of the kingdom." Droṇa and Vidura both supported Bhīshma.

Karṇa alone opposed all such conciliatory moves. He did not support Duryodhana's evil and dishonourable schemes either. Fighting on the battle-field was the only honourable way that he could think of to bring about the fall of the Pāṇdavas.

L. YUDHISHTHIRA AS THE KING OF INDRAPRASTHA :

Dhṛitrāshtra finally thought it more politic to settle all differences between the cousins by

dividing the kingdom among his own sons and his nephews. Vidura was sent to Pāṇchāla to bring the Pāṇdavas and Draupadī to Hastināpur. Drupada had no faith in the promises made by Dhṛitrāshtra, but he left it to the Pāṇdavas to decide whether they would go to Hastināpur or not. Balarāma and Kṛishṇa, who happened to be at Pāṇchāla, advised the Pāṇdavas to go to Hastināpur for an amicable solution of the problem. Vidura assured Kuntī that no evil could befall her sons.

The Pāṇdavas, accompanied by Kṛishṇa, set out for Hastināpur, where they were given a cordial welcome. Dhṛitrāshtra gave Hastināpur to his own sons, while the five Pāṇdavas were given an area, known as the Khāṇḍavaprastha. Vyāsa also arrived and, on an auspicious day, Yudhishthira was crowned as the king of Khāṇḍavaprastha.

It was at Khāṇḍavaprastha as the capital that the ancestors of the dynasty, Pururavas, Nahusha and Yayāti had once ruled. Later the place had been abandoned and had become a barren waste. Yudhishthira accepted the command of his uncle with great humility, without raising any objection, and proceeded to Khāṇḍavaprastha. In due course, the face of the country was changed. The

jungles were cleared, a strong fort was built and the foundations of a new city, called Indraprastha, were laid.

a. Arjuna's Exile :

The five brothers lived happily with Draupadī as their common wife. On the advice of Nārada, the brothers entered into a solemn covenant among themselves to avoid any misunderstanding in future. The agreement laid down that when one of the brother was with Draupadī, other brothers would not intrude on their privacy, but if someone broke the covenant, he would have to go into voluntary exile for a period of twelve years. Unfortunately, Arjuna became guilty of breaking the covenant one day for no fault of his own. A poor brāhmaṇa, whose cattle had been carried away by robbers, sought Arjuna's help to punish the robbers and in order to get his weapons, he entered the room where Yudhishtira sat with Draupadī. He hastened after the robbers and recovered the cattle of the brāhmaṇa. On return, he decided to go into exile much against the will of Yudhishtira. "I cannot waver from truth, for truth is my weapon," said Arjuna.

During this period of exile, Arjuna visited a number of places. Near Haridwār he married

Ulūpi, the daughter of Vāsuki, the king of the serpents. He stayed there for some time and had a son, named Irāwata. In the far east, he married the daughter of the king of Manipur, named Chitrangadā. There he stayed for about three years and had a son, named Babhruvāhana.

Arjuna next arrived at Mount Mahendra, where he met Parashurāma, who gave him several powerful weapons. Finally, he reached Dwārikā where he made friends with Kṛishṇa.

Arjuna sought the hand of Kṛishṇa's sister, Subhadrā, whom Balarāma had proposed to give in marriage to Duryodhana. On Kṛishṇa's advice, Arjuna decided to carry away Subhadrā by force. He drove his chariot very close to Subhadrā, lifted her up and drove fast towards Indraprastha. Balarāma's anger knew no bounds, but Kṛishṇa succeeded in appeasing him. Arjuna and Subhadrā were then recalled to Dwārika and married according to traditional rites.

By then, the period of exile for Arjuna was over and he returned to Indraprastha along with Subhadrā. On arrival, Subhadrā made obeisance before Draupadī and said, "I am your handmaiden." Draupadī embraced her and the two never quarrelled thereafter. Draupadī had five children

by her five husbands, while Subhadrā had one by Arjuna, named Abhimanyu.

b. Khāndavaprastha on Fire:

One day when Kṛishṇa and Arjuna went out into the thick forest outside Indraprastha, a brāhmaṇa came to them. His form was glowing like molten gold, with red beard and red eyes and with the entire body red like the rising sun. Said he to Kṛishṇa and Arjuna, "I am hungry and you must satisfy my hunger. Ordinary food does not satisfy me. I am Agni, the god of fire. I want to burn down this vast forest. But Lord Indra does not let me fulfil my desire, because this forest is the home of his friend, Takshaka, the king of the serpents'."

Arjuna promised to help Agni, provided he was given a strong bow, a quiver with never-ending flow of arrows and a chariot with fast horses. It was on this occasion that Arjuna got, as a gift from Agni, the famous Gāndīva, two quivers with never-ending flow of arrows and a beautiful chariot with four white horses.

Once Arjuna and Kṛishṇa were ready to help Agni, the whole forest was set on fire by Agni. It was a terrific fire, indeed. Indra sent heavy rain in torrents to extinguish fire, but the heat of the flames was so intense that all rain water

evaporated fast. All other gods also came to the help of Indra, but the burning of the forest continued unabated. The fire raged for hours and the entire forest was burnt to ashes.

All the time, Arjuna remained alert and would not permit any one to escape—not even birds or small animals. Takshaka did not happen to be there at that time but when his wife and his son, Ashwasena, tried to escape, the mother was shot dead and only the son could escape.

Only one Asura, named Māyā, an architect, was permitted by Arjuna to escape unhurt.

Indra was mighty pleased with his son Arjuna's strong will and steadfastness. He gave up fighting against Agni. Arjuna fell at the feet of his father and sought forgiveness. He requested Indra to give him certain weapons, which he promised to give at the right time.

CHAPTER II

SABHĀ PARVA

(EVENTS IN THE ASSEMBLY HALL)

A. YUDHISHTHIRA'S TRIUMPH : THE RĀJASŪYA YAJNA :

a. The Māyā Sabhā at Indraprastha :

Māyā, the architect of the Asuras, who had begged Arjuna and Kṛishṇa for mercy and had been granted life, was keen to do something to express his gratitude to both of them. While Arjuna was unwilling to accept anything from him, Kṛishṇa thought it best to take him to Yudhishthira at Indraprastha for the latter might like to get some palace constructed by such an eminent architect.

Yudhishthira welcomed and honoured Māyā and discussed with him the plans for the construction of an assembly hall (sabhā). On an auspicious day, Māyā started the work. He went to Mount Kailāsh and Maināka, where in a lake close by, called Bindusāras, considered sacred for it is there that the river Gangā was released from the matted locks of Lord Shiva, Māyā had buried a rich

treasure of precious gems. These he brought to Indraprastha and used lavishly in constructing the sabhā. He also brought a club (gadā) for Bhīma and a conch, called the Devadatta, for Arjuna. It took Māyā fourteen months to complete the construction work of the Sabhā and it excelled even the sabhā of Indra in its splendour. The fame of the sabhā spread far and wide. All types of people, including princes as well as sages, came to see and admire the assembly hall.

b. Nārada's visit to Indraprastha :

One day, the great sage Nārada arrived at Indraprastha to see the sabhā, because he had heard a lot about its magnificence. Nārada had seen similar sabhās in the other worlds and he considered this one to be the best on this earth. He described the sabhā of Indra, where the throne was shared by Harishchandra, and the sabhā of Yama where, along with Yama, were seated kings like Nahusha and Yayāti. As no mention was made by Nārada of the immediate ancestors of Yudhishtira, Shāntanu and Pāndu, Yudhishtira sought to know from Nārada why they had not shared the throne of Indra. Nārada explained how Harishchandra had performed the Rājasūya yajna and had thus become eligible to share the throne

with Indra. Nārada advised Yudhishtira to perform the Rājasūya so that his ancestors, Shāntanu and Pāndu, could also become eligible for similar honoured place with Indra. According to Nārada, such was also the desire of Pāndu in the heavens. It was the Rājasūya yajna that mattered, Nārada pointed out, and it should not be difficult for Yudhishtira to perform the same with the active assistance of his brothers and benign guidance of Kṛishṇa, he added.

Thereafter, Yudhishtira began to brood over the question : “Was it feasible for him to perform the Rājasūya yajna? Which rulers were likely to oppose him? etc.” Everyone in his council, including his brothers, was enthusiastic about the proposal, but it was not enough for Yudhishtira. With a view to getting honest and straightforward opinion from someone, he sent a messenger to Dwārikā and invited Kṛishṇa to Indraprastha for consultation. Kṛishṇa gave him full support for performance of the Rājasūya yajna, though he pointed out that Jarāsandha, the king of Magadha, who had conquered sixty-eight rulers and made them all captive, was not likely to accept the sovereignty of Yudhishtira.

c. The Slaying of Jarāsandha :

Jarāsandha, a ruler of matchless strength, was said to have a miraculous birth. His father, Brihadrātha, received a mantra-charmed mango as a gift from a great sage and gave its half portions to his two wives. In due course they gave birth to half a child each. The two pieces were just thrown away but Jarā, a rākshasī, picked them up for eating. Accidentally, she put them together and the body became alive. She handed over the child to his father, who named him Jarāsandha (united by Jarā).

When Kṛishṇa pointed out to Yudhishtira that Jarāsandha was almost invincible, the latter began to think of giving up the idea of fighting against him. But Kṛishṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna combined their resources and hit upon a plan. The three of them dressed themselves as brāhmaṇas and arrived in the palace of Jarāsandha in Magadha, his capital. Jarāsandha welcomed them but when he went to see them at night, their conduct made him suspicious. On learning that they were not brāhmaṇas but kshatriyas, most chivalrously he agreed to fight Bhīma without weapons. In the combat that followed and lasted thirteen days, Jarāsandha was finally torn into two pieces by Bhīma, exactly the way he was united.

His son, Sahadeva, was installed as the king of Magadha and he became an ally of Yudhishthira. The rulers who had been in captivity were all released and they took an oath of loyalty to Yudhishthira.

d. The Victory Marches to the Four Quarters :

Yudhishthira then sent his four brothers to the four quarters of Bhāratavarsha to seek allegiance of the rulers and to collect tributes from them.

Arjuna proceeded to the north. He defeated Bhagadatta, the king of Prāgjyotisha and also the reputed Trigarta brothers led by Susharmā. He reached the northern-most point and defeated a number of rulers in the hilly regions. Finally he arrived at the Mānsarovar lake and enjoyed the sublime spectacle of Mount Meru.

Bhīma went towards the east and defeated the rulers of Mithilā, Koshala, Ayodhyā and other places. In Chedi, Shishupāla received him with affection. In Magadha, he was honoured by the new ruler, Sahadeva.

Sahadeva proceeded to the south and subdued the rulers of Avantī and sent Ghatotkacha to Lankā to invite the ruler of that country to the Rājasūya yajna.

Nakula was sent to the west, where he met the Yadava rulers at Dwārikā and invited Vāsudeva to the Rājasūya.

A large number of rulers came to Indraprastha to pay their respects to Yudhishtira. Those who were friends brought rich gifts and those who had been defeated brought tributes. From Hastināpur came Dhṛitrāshtra, Bhīshma, Vidura, Duryodhana and others. Some were delighted to see the glory of Indraprastha, while others grew jealous.

e. The Guest of Honour :

According to tradition, on such an occasion, the greatest among the guests is duly honoured by presenting him with *Arghya*. The elders were all of opinion that Kṛishṇa was the right choice to be given the 'First Honour'. Bhīshma said, "He indeed shines amidst all the galaxy of men, like the Sun amidst the luminaries."

Shishupāla, the king of Chedī, was the only one who protested and used foul language, calling Kṛishṇa bad names, such as 'the uncrowned chieftain' and 'the cowherd of low birth'. Said he, "For what reason should homage be paid to Kṛishṇa, when he is neither the holiest priest, nor the wisest preceptor, nor the greatest warrior, nor the foremost ruler?"

Kṛishṇa remained calm for some time but when Shishupāla became very aggressive and insolent, he said, "I had promised the mother of Shishupāla to pardon a hundred sins committed by her son. Now the number of more than a hundred." Having spoken thus, Kṛishṇa flung his discus which struck Shishupāla on his neck and his head was severed off.

f. The Rājāsūya Yajna :

Thereafter the Rājāsūya yajna was performed with great solemnity and in peace. The day of coronation was an impressive event. Holy waters were sprinkled over Yudhishtira and all the rulers made obeisance and honoured Yudhishtira. One by one, all the rulers took leave and departed for their respective capitals.

Kṛishṇa gave blessings to Yudhishtira, saying, "Rule over thy people with wisdom and care. Be free from pride and passion. Govern the kingdom with justice and holiness, O Yudhishtira !"

It was a great triumph for Yudhishtira.

g. Duryodhana seized by Jealousy :

Duryodhana, Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karṇa did not leave immediately and stayed on for

a few more days. This was unfortunate indeed, because certain events took place that further fanned the smouldering fire of jealousy in the heart of Duryodhana. One day, as Duryodhana was moving about, he mistook the crystal-clear pavement for water and pulled up his clothes. On another occasion he mistook the pond for the pavement floor and fell into it. Once he thought that it was a doorway and tried to walk through it but he hit against a blank wall. Peels of laughter greeted him. His jealousy turned into bitter hatred.

Envyng Yudhishtira's fame and prosperity, Duryodhana often said to his maternal uncle, Shakuni, "Seized by jealousy, I cannot bear the sight of glorious Yudhishtira and I will die by fire, poison or drowning. I tried to destroy him but he has grown. So I think that fate is more powerful and effort is meaningless."

Duryodhana knew well that he could not overcome the Pāndavas in an open conflict. No other alternative was left for him but to take recourse to mean and unwholesome schemes.

B. THE INVITATION TO A GAMBLING MATCH:

Unfortunately Yudhishtira was fond of playing the dice, though he did not know how to

play it well.'

On the other hand, Shakuni, the maternal uncle of Duryodhana, was renowned for his skill as a dice player. He was always lucky because he played with a loaded dice. Duryodhana plotted with him to invite Yudhishtira for a gambling match.

Dhṛitrāshtra did not like the idea because he was not in favour of antagonising the Pāndavas. Vidura also did not like that such cunning and dishonest means be adopted to harm the Pāndavas. But Duryodhana went on pestering his father and, finally outargued and through sheer helplessness, Dhṛitrāshtra gave his assent. Vidura was sent to Indrarastha to invite Yudhishtira to come to Hastināpur for a game of dice. Yudhishtira knew well that wagering games are the root cause of many evils, but he could not refuse to accept the invitation. The Pāndava brothers, with their mother, Kuntī, and wife, Draupadī, journeyed to Hastināpur where they were given a warm welcome by Dhṛitrāshtra.

a. Yudhishtira gambled away All :

The gambling match was arranged in a gorgeous pavilion. All the princes and chieftains

assembled there. Shakuni invited Yudhishthira to play.

Said Yudhishthira, "I will play if the opponent promises to play a fair game, without trickery. Deceitful gambling is sinful and unworthy of the Kshatriyas."

Replied Shakuni, "A skilled player ever plays with an aim, to defeat the opponent, as one warrior fights another on the battlefield. A man plays or fights to achieve glory and victory. If you are in dread of me, O Yudhishthira, it were better if you do not play at all."

Yudhishthira, having been thus challenged, refused to withdraw. At the very first throw, Yudhishthira lost. Indeed, he lost at every throw on that fatal day. He gambled away his money, all his jewels, his elephants, his chariots; in fact, everything. He lost the whole kingdom but he did not stop playing even thereafter. One by one, he staked and lost his brothers. He staked himself and lost. Lastly he staked Draupadī and lost her as well.

b. Draupadī humiliated :

The spectators watched the game in silence. Duhshāsana and others laughed aloud. Duryodhana rose and asked Vidura to go and fetch Draupadī to the hall to work like other slave girls.

Vidura warned Duryodhana : “You fool, you are caught in a noose. You do not know that you are hanging over a precipice. Even now it is not too late. I warn you against the terrible wrath of the Pāndavas. Draupadī is not your slave and do not humiliate her.”

“Fie upon you,” said Duryodhana to Vidura and ordered one of the attendants to go and bring Draupadī in the pavilion. When that man gave the message to Draupadī, she rose in pride and said, “If my lord had staked himself and become a slave, he had no right left thereafter to stake me.” This defiant reply of Draupadī all the more enraged Duryodhana, who then asked his brother, Duhshāsana, to go and fetch her. Duhshāsana entered the inner chambers and seized Draupadi by her hair. Trembling with fear and shame, she asked Duhshāsana not to defile her with his unclean hands but Duhshāsana would not yield. Draupadī was dragged through the streets and brought to the pavilion. Bhīshma, Drona and others hung their heads in shame.

c. Draupadī posed a Question :

Draupadī looked around and cried in anguish: “O noble ones, is there nothing like dharma in this court? Will you permit this wrong to continue? Has



चित्र-चमन, दे. दून

5. Dushāshana tried to strip Draupadi naked in the Assembly. Draupadi prayed to Krishna, "O Lord, I seek refuge in thee."

Bhīshma lost his virtue and wisdom and Droṇa his valour? Will the sons of Pāṇdu not protect their outraged queen? Why this silence?"

Bhīshma failed to give an answer to Draupadī's question. He said, "Yudhishtira played willingly. I am not sure whether he had a right to use you as a wager after he had lost himself." Duhshāsana, -Karna, Shakuni and others laughed merrily and said, "Do not worry about the subtleties of righteousness. You are a slave and your duty is to please your new master." Bhima lost his temper and, trembling like a leaf, spoke harsh words to his brother, Yudhishtira, but Arjuna pacified him. Bhīma heaved with fury and indignation but tried to control himself. There was only one person in the court, Vikarna, one of the brothers of Duryodhana, who, in precise and clear terms, announced : "Yudhishtira had no right to use Draupadī as the wager, as she is the wife of all the brothers and not just his wife. She has not been lost; she is free."

No one in the pavilion bothered about the righteousness of the action. The Pāṇdava brothers thirsted for revenge but had to be quiet. Bhīshma, Drona and Vidura seemed helpless. Duhshāsana went a step further. He even tried to strip Draupadī naked before the august assembly. In her distress,

she prayed to Kṛishṇa with her palms folded together: "O imperishable Lord, armed with discus, conch and mace, residing in Dwārikā, Govind of the lotus-eye, I seek refuge in you. I surrender myself to you." It was a miracle, indeed ! Kṛishṇa increased the length of Draupadī's garments. Duhshāsana failed to disrobe Draupadi and was greatly disappointed.

d. The Ominous Oaths :

At that ominous hour, Bhīma clenched his hands and cried out: "I shall not go to the heavens unless, one day, I kill this sinner, rend his breast open and drink his heart's blood." Duryodhana lost reason and invited Draupadī to come, as a slave girl, and sit upon his thigh. Bhīma burnt with anger and swore: "If I do not break that thigh one day, I will not go to the heavens where my forefathers are." Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, all of them, took terrible oaths. Only Yudhishtira patiently bore all insults heaped upon the Pāndavas and Draupadī for he feared to violate righteousness.

e. The Pāndavas freed from Bondage:

So far, Dhṛitrāshtra did not know what was happening. When Vidura told him all that had

taken place and the terrible oaths taken by the Pāṇḍava brothers, he shuddered with fear and shame, and could see the ill omens. He was led to the pavilion, where he condemned all actions of Duryodhana and tried to sooth the afflicted mind of Draupadī thus : “Alas, my sons have wronged you in a foul manner today. Forgive them and let the wrath of the heavens be averted.” Dhṛitrāshtra asked Draupadī to seek boons she wanted. She asked for the release of her husbands from bondage. When Dhṛitrāshtra asked her to seek more boons, she refused to do so as to seek more favours was against Dharma. Then Dhṛitarāshtra said to Yudhishtira, “You have no enemy. You know the significance of Dharma. Where there is Dharma, there is peace. You are free to go to Indraprastha and rule over your kingdom.” With Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas sat in their chariots and departed for their capital.

C. THE SECOND GAMBLING MATCH:

Duryodhana, Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karṇa were most unhappy to find that the old man had undone all that they had achieved with such great difficulty. Duryodhana was angry with his father : “You have now kindled their wrath to the extreme and they are bound to wreak vengeance

on us. Do you think they would remain quiet after reaching Īndraprastha? Do you think that Drupada would sit quiet once he hears how Draupadī has been humiliated by us?”

Duryodhana insisted that the Pāṇdavas be once more invited for a second gambling match, the only wager this time being that whosoever lost should go into exile for a period of twelve years, followed by one year spent incognito, but if in that one year they were discovered they would have to go again into exile for a period of twelve years.

The old king wavered between righteousness and his paternal affection and finally yielded. No one in the court approved of this evil-minded plot. Duryodhana was sure that once the old king sent the invitation, Yudhishthira would not refuse.

Dhṛitrāshtra's messenger overtook Yudhishthira and handed him the message for a second challenge. Yudhishthira said to himself. 'We are in the hands of Destiny. All our actions are thus ordained by the Creator. I must go and play again.'

Yudhishthira played again : the same hall, the same dice and the same Shakuni. Shakuni won and Yudhishthira lost.

The Pāṇdavas prepared for the exile. They cast off their royal garments and clad themselves as mendicants and bade farewell to the elders.

Kuntī stayed behind with Vidura.

It was a heart-rending scene. Grief of Draupadī was inconsolable. She loosened her hair and took a vow: “From this day my hair will fall over my forehead until Bhīma shall have slain Duhshāsana and drunk his blood. Then shall Bhīma tie up my tresses, while his hands are still wet with Duhshāsana’s blood.”

Vidura blessed the Pāndavas : “Be saintly in exile, subdue your passions, learn truth in your sorrow and return in happiness.”

Dhṛitrāshtra asked Vidura : “Tell me how the Pāndavas left for exile.” Vidura replied : “I can see that the future is dark. The evil omens are visible in the high heavens. It is your doing.”

From that day onwards Dhṛitrāshtra had no peace of mind. Sanjaya, his charioteer, said to him: “You are responsible for all these misdeeds. You will reap the fruits of your sinful actions. The day is not far off when the Pāndavas will come back and destroy your sons.”

CHAPTER III

VANA PARVA (LIFE IN THE FOREST)

A. THE PĀNDAVAS IN THE KĀMYAKA FOREST :

The Pāndava princes, along with Draupadī, retired to the Kāmyaka forest on the bank of the river Saraswatī. Their brāhmaṇa priest, Dhaumya, was also with them.

a. Vidura's Arrival:

One day the Pāndavas were surprised to see uncle Vidura coming all alone in a chariot. They just wondered: "Was uncle coming with an invitation for another game of dice or was he bringing a challenge for war from Duryodhana ?"

Vidura was known for his very high sense of fairness and justice. He had always given his honest, frank advice to the old king, Dhṛitrāshtra. After the departure of the Pāndavas, Dhṛitrāshtra, with an uneasy mind, wanted Vidura to console him, but Vidura had the same advice to give over and over again. Dhṛitrāshtra got excited and said, "You are only hurting my feelings. I do not want

you here. You may go and stay with the Pāṇdavas for whom you have all sympathies.” So, Vidura arrived in the Kāmyaka forest to stay with the Pāṇdavas. But it was difficult for Dhṛitrāshtra to stay in Hastināpur without Vidura. Immediately he sent Sanjaya to bring Vidura back. Vidura returned to his brother who needed him badly in the hour of distress.

Kṛishṇa also arrived in the forest to see the Pāṇdavas. He tried to console Draupadī who sobbed and sobbed as if her heart would break. Kṛishṇa was terribly angry and prophesied that the Kauravas would perish one day and that the Kaurava women would weep one day as Draupadī had wept.

b. Duryodhana and Karṇa in Conspiracy:

When Vidura left Hastināpur, Duryodhana and his allies feared that the old king had again sent him to the Pāṇdavas for some conciliatory talks. Karṇa had a suggestion to make: “Why should we not march against the Pāṇdavas and destroy them for ever and then rest in peace?” Duryodhana liked the suggestion, but Vyāsa arrived in time and advised the king to stop his sons from taking recourse to such mean actions. The great sage, Maitreya, also condemned

Duryodhana for his dishonourable actions and spoke gloomily about the future of the Kuru dynasty. The king grew worried, but evil-minded Duryodhana would not think of righteousness in his actions. He continued to plan how to make the life of the Pāndavas more miserable. That alone could give him peace of mind.

c. Draupadī's Remonstrances:

Time was not the healer for Draupadī and her mental anguish and bitterness continued. In the presence of Kṛishṇa, she poured forth her misery by saying, "O Madhusūdan, I have no husbands, no sons, no relations, no brothers, no father and not even you to help me. You have all been indifferent to my miseries."

In the presence of Yudhishtira, Draupadī would often lament her fate: "What peace can my heart know now, O Lord? Does not your wrath blaze up on seeing your brothers and me in distress? A kshatriya who forgives his enemy is the most despised of all men."

Yudhishtira would reply: "Anger is sinful. A weak man cannot control his wrath and a man of wisdom has to subdue his passions. One who is forgiving shall attain eternal happiness."

Draupadī would continue to argue: "Men can never gain prosperity by forgiveness. Your virtue has not helped you, O Lord. You are only following a shadow."

Yudhishtira would reply: "My heart turns towards goodness. One who doubts goodness shall never attain eternal bliss."

Draupadī would continue to remonstrate: "In my sorrow I but rave. Yet I hold that a man should act. Without action no one can live. One who believes in chance and destiny lives a life of weakness."

Bhīma always supported Draupadī. While other brothers would remain quiet, Bhima would say, "Brother, what is the use of talking about righteousness? Did they conquer our kingdom by honest means? Did they not cheat you in the game of dice? What did we do when Draupadi was humiliated? We can fight against their righteousness only by unrighteous means. You are getting leaner and leaner everyday by thinking and talking of righteousness. Duryodhana got the kingdom by deceit, not by dharma. We have spent thirteen months in the forest. We will consider them as thirteen years and fight and regain our kingdom. We are kshatriyas. Let us act like kshatriyas."

Yudhishtira said, “Bhīma, you are right. I am to blame, as I have brought you all to this plight. I have taken a pledge to spend twelve years in the forest and to spend the thirteenth year in disguise. I cannot break the pledge. You will have what you want, a war against the Kauravas, but only after thirteen years. No one can make me swerve from righteousness.”

B. Arjuna's penance to seek celestial weapons :

The Pāndavas knew well that a war against the Kauravas was inevitable. They were determined to prepare for the same. It was imperative for them to acquire celestial weapons, such as were possessed by Bhīshma, Drona and Karṇa. On the advice of Vyāsa, in the sixth year of their exile, Arjuna proceeded to Mount Kailāsh where he went through hard austerities to please Lord Shiva. He raised his arms aloft, stood on his tiptoes, ate withered leaves and lived only on air. Then Shiva appeared before him in the garb of a hunter and challenged him for a combat. Arjuna was cast on the ground and he fainted. On gathering consciousness he made a clay image of Shiva and put a garland of flowers round its neck. Soon he observed that the same garland was round the neck of that hunter. It was then that



6. Arjuna underwent hard penances on mountain Kailāsh—Lord Shiva granted him the gift of a celestial weapon—Pashupata.

Arjuna realised that the hunter was none other than Shiva himself. He prostrated before Him and Lord Shiva gave him a gift of a celestial weapon, named Pāshupata. Later, Varuṇa, Kubera, Indra and Yama, the lords of the four quarters, also blessed him. Arjuna was overcome with a sense of humility.

Indra then took away Arjuna in his chariot to his celestial city. There Uravasi, a sea-born apsara, fell in love with him but when Arjuna did not respond, she cursed him that for a season he would have to live among women as a dancer and musician. It was the effect of this curse that Arjuna worked as an instructor in dance and music for a year for the royal princesses in Virātanagar. Arjuna stayed in the celestial city for about five years and gained proficiency in dance and music.

On Indra's advice, Arjuna also marched in his chariot against the demons and giants of the underworld, who were enemies of Indra, and gave them a crushing defeat and destroyed their magnificent city, named Hiranyanagar.

C. Yudhishthira's pilgrimage :

Almost five years had gone by since Arjuna had left to seek celestial weapons. It indeed became a trying time for Yudhishthira, more so

because Bhīma became critical of him on one more point: "We are kshatriyas, born to fight and not to undergo penances. We can destroy the Kauravas even without celestial weapons. Please recall Arjuna from his penance."

Meanwhile, two great sages, Nārada and Lomas, arrived and advised Yudhishtira to go on a pilgrimage, the latter being willing to accompany him. Lomas also informed Yudhishtira that Arjuna was with Indra and would return soon after rendering some service to him.

The Pāndava brothers, along with Draupadī and Dhaumya, proceeded on a pilgrimage, accompanied by sage Lomas. They visited a number of religious places—Triveni Sangama at Prayāg, river Mahānadi, Āshrama of Agastya, Hemakūta mountain, down south the river Godāvari, southern rivers, Agastyatīrtha, right upto the ocean. Next they went to Dwārikā and stayed for some time with Balarāma and Kṛishṇa. Balarāma particularly was unhappy to see the plight of the Pāndavas and, in an impassioned tone, said, "Let us go and fight against the Kauravas and restore the kingdom to the Pāndavas." However, Sātyaki and Kṛishṇa agreed with Yudhishtira, who advised patience because he was keen to keep the pledge once made.

Next, the Pāṇdavas proceeded to the north and reached Mountain Maināka and Kailāsh, watched the beauty of Lake Bindusāras and finally arrived at Mountain Māṇḍāra, the seat of Kubera. When the Pāṇdavas tried to ascend Mountain Māṇḍāra, Draupadī fainted with strain of the journey. Bhīma remembered Ghatotkacha, who arrived with some of his followers, and took all of them to the top of the Kailāsh : the land of eternal sunlight. It was here that Arjuna arrived in Indra's chariot. Indra himself came to bless the Pāṇdavas. Then they proceeded to their Āshram in the Kāmyaka forest.

By the time they reached Dwaitavana, eleven years of exile were over. Just one more year was to be spent in the forest and one more in disguise.

D. Spite failed to bring joy to Duryodhana :

Eleven years of the Pāṇdavas' exile were over and only two more years were left. This made Duryodhana rather uneasy in mind. He began to think of ways and means to make the Pāṇdavas repeat thirteen years of exile.

Duryodhana, Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karṇa were keen on spying on the Pāṇdavas in the forest. They also wanted to take pleasure in their miseries : to see them dressed in tree barks and to

see Draupadī with her pride shattered. In the neighbourhood of Dwaitavana, the Kauravas had their cattle station. On the pretext of visiting the cattle station, they arrived with a small retinue and their wives and attendants, quite close to the āshram of the Pāndavas. Close by there was a lake. Duryodhana decided to go to the lake along with the womenfolk. But a gāndharva was already there along with his retinue. Duryodhana's people became involved with those of the gāndharva. Karṇa was badly defeated and he fled away: Duryodhana was overpowered and his arms were tied behind him with ropes. Duḥshāsana and others, including the women, were all made captive. It was so humiliating.

In despair, some members of Duryodhana's retinue went to the āshram of the Pāndavas and sought their help. Bhīma was overjoyed to learn of the defeat faced by Duryodhana. But Yudhishtira did not approve of Bhīma's attitude: "They are our kinsmen. It is a question of the honour of our family. Take Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva along with you and rescue Duryodhana and other members of his party." The gāndharvas were fighters of no mean order, but the Pāndava brothers succeeded in compelling them to release the captive Kauravas. Yudhishtira said to Duryodhana: "Spite

never brings happiness. Go back to your kingdom. I wish well of you.” There was a touch of both affection and pity in the voice of Yudhishtira. Duryodhana felt so humiliated that he even thought of committing suicide.

Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karna tried their best to dissuade him from a decision to end his life. However, when he was left alone, the evil genius within him got the better of him and he returned to the capital and resumed his work. The poet tells us how the daityas and the dānavas did not like their favourite king to end his life in frustration and promised him help in his coming struggle against the Pāndavas.

E. Duryodhana’s Rājasūya Yajna :

Since return from Indraprastha after watching the Rājasūya Yajna performed by Yudhishtira, Duryodhana had cherished a desire in his heart to perform a similar yajna. For this he sought the support of Karṇa. Karṇa readily agreed and went out on a victory campaign. Messengers were sent to kings inviting them for the Rājasūya yajna. A messenger was also sent to Dwaitavana. Yudhishtira was happy to learn that Duryodhana, his cousin, was performing the Rājasūya yajna, and wished him well, though he expressed his inability

to participate, as the Pāṇdavas, could not enter Hastināpur until the thirteen years were over. But Bhīma sent back a reply: "On return from the exile, Yudhishtira will perform the yajna again and in its flame will burn the entire family of Dhṛitrāshtra." Dhṛitrāshtra was happy that his son had, like Yudhishtira, performed the Rājasuya. Duryodhana and Karṇa came still closer thereafter and Karṇa took a vow: "I will neither eat venison nor wash my feet until I have killed Arjuna." Duryodhana said: "With Karṇa as my friend, I have nothing to fear from the Pāṇdavas on their return from the exile."

F. Jayadratha's misbehaviour :

In the last year of the exile of the Pāṇdavas, one more unfortunate event occurred. By then, the Pāṇdavas had moved to Kāmyaka forest.

One day, when the five Pāṇdavas had gone out a-hunting, Jayadratha, the husband of the cousin (sister) of the Pāṇdavas, named Dushshāla, happened to pass by the Āshram of the Pāṇdavas. He picked up Draupadī and carried her away forcibly in his chariot. Dhaumya was there at the āshram, but he was powerless against the big retinue of Jayadratha. On return from the hunt, when the Pāṇdavas learnt of this heinous act of

Jayadratha, they pursued him and threw him a challenge. His forces melted away and Draupadī was rescued. Bhīma and Arjuna followed the runaway king, who hid himself in a thicket. He was easily defeated and Bhīma dashed him on the ground. He might have killed him, but Arjuna prevented him from doing so, as he was such a close kinsman. Bhīma disfigured him by cutting his hair in a funny style and then brought him captive before Yudhishtira, where he was made to prostrate before him as a menial servant. All these years, the Pāndavas had faced great hardships. Yudhishtira had imposed self-restraint on himself, but he was suffering no doubt, though suffering in silence. How difficult must he have found to follow the rigid code of righteousness. All these years, he had been pleading before Draupadī and Bhīma to have patience. Now he himself was more impatient than the others were.

G. The Pāndavas and the Yaksha :

When the twelfth year of the exile was drawing to a close, the Pāndavas decided to leave the forest. A strange adventure almost threatened them with total annihilation.

A stag carried away upon his antlers the twigs with which a brāhmaṇa was supposed to kindle his

holy fire. He appealed to Yudhishtira to pursue the animal. The Pāndavas tried to kill the stag but in vain. At length they sat down to rest. As they were all very thirsty, Nakula was sent to fetch water from a pond. When Nakula approached the pond, he heard a voice, "Answer the questions which I ask you before drawing or drinking water from the pond." Nakula did not pay any heed to the voice and drank water. He fell dead immediately. Sahadeva, Arjuna and Bhīma all fell dead likewise.

At last Yudhishtira approached the pond and he readily agreed to reply to the questions being asked by that voice which was that of a yaksha.

Yudhishtira answered all questions patiently and with deep knowledge. One of the many questions was: "Who is spoken of as the unconquered enemy of man? What is spoken of as men's permanent disease? Who is regarded as holy? Who is regarded as unholy?" Yudhishtira replied very wisely: "Man's unconquered enemy is anger. His permanent disease is covetousness. He who seeks the good of all is holy and he who is selfishly cold is unholy."

The yaksha revealed himself before Yudhishtira. He was Dharma, god of wisdom and justice. He asked Yudhishtira to choose one of his brothers to be restored to life. Yudhishtira chose

Nakula. The spirit said: "Bhīma is so dear to you and Arjuna is your great support. Why do you choose your step-brother to be restored to life?" Yudhishthira replied: "My father had two wives; let each one have one surviving son. I do not make any difference between two mothers of mine."

This pleased the yaksha very much and he restored all the brothers to life.

The yaksha gave one more boon to Yudhishthira: the Pāṇdavas would have the power to remain unrecognised by anyone in the three worlds during the thirteenth year of their exile.

Chapter IV

VIRĀTA PARVA

(LIFE IN VIRĀTA CITY)

A. THE PLANS FOR THE THIRTEENTH YEAR:

Before the end of the twelfth year, the Pāndavas began to think of the plans for the thirteenth year: where to stay and what role to play, so that they could not be discovered by the Kauravas, otherwise they would be required to spend another thirteen years in exile.

a. Virātanagar—the Place to stay:

There were a number of convenient places where they could stay and they were to choose anyone of those—Pāñchāla, Dwarikā, Magadha, Videha, Virāta, etc. They would have loved to stay at a place like Pāñchāla or Dwārikā or Magadha, where they could have all conveniences of life, but these would have been the first places where Duryodhana would have looked up for them. The place to be chosen was to be rather obscure and yet suitable to spend one full year incognito. Virāta was, therefore, chosen, more because the king of the place was said to be noble and generous.

b. Respective Roles to play:

Coming to the role that each one of them would like to play, Yudhishtira decided to call himself a brāhmaṇa with the name of Kanka. He would wear garlands of tulsī and crystals and count the rosaries all the time. He would offer his services to the king as an instructor in the game of dice.

Bhīma, who was fond of cooking and eating tasty dishes, decided to offer his services as a cook with the name of Valāla. Besides, he would also offer his services as a wrestler to train youngsters in the art of wrestling.

Arjuna had achieved high proficiency in the art of dance and music, while he was at the court of Indra during the period of exile and had also not forgotten the curse of Urvashī. He decided to offer his services to train the princesses in dancing and singing. He decided to wear long hair and dress as a eunuch with feminine attire, which was also necessary to conceal his kshatriya physique. Arjuna was to assume the name of Brihannāla.

Nakula decided to offer his services to train horses under the name of Damagranthī.

Sahadeva offered his knowledge of handling cows and bulls, as Virāta's chief wealth lay in cattle. He named himself Tantripāla.

Draupadī named herself Sairandhrī and planned to approach the queen, offering her services to dress her hair in a hundred different ways or to make flower garlands in different shapes. She had full confidence that the queen would appreciate her services in the art of personal decoration.

The Pāndavas concealed their arms in the high branches of a tree to look like a dead body and then proceeded to Virātanagar. None of them had any difficulty in securing services as they had planned. Draupadī, however, put forth two conditions, which were accepted by the queen—she would not wash the feet of any one and she would not eat food left after the meals were over.

The king soon acquired great liking for each one of the Pāndavas. The queen also began to have special liking for Sairandhrī.

The funniest thing was that each one of the Pāndava brothers and Sairandhrī talked of the court of Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira claimed that he had been Yudhishtira's friend and had lived in his house and was his very body. Sairandhrī claimed to have once been the hand-maiden of Draupadī, who had five gāndharvas as her husbands. Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva—all claimed to have served under Yudhishtira.

thira. Whatever each one of them said about himself or herself was the truth and at the same time it was not the whole truth.

All went well in the first ten months. Yudnīshthira stayed all the time with the king. Arjuna was asked to train Uttarā in dance and music. Bhīma loved the job of cooking. He also became a great favourite of the king since the day a foreigner came to the court and claimed to be an invincible wrestler and Bhīma lifted him up, twirled him round and round like a wheel till he felt giddy and became unconscious. When Bhīma dashed him to the ground, he was dead.

B. KĪCHAKA CAST LUSTFUL EYES ON DRAUPADĪ—SLAIN BY BHĪMA:

One day, the queen's brother, Kīchaka, who was the commander of the king's forces, chanced to see Sairandhrī and fell in love with her. He made amorous overtures to her, tried to seduce her and even sought the help of his sister in winning her over.

One day, the queen asked Sairandhrī to fetch her some rare wine from Kīchaka's palace. Much against her will, she had to go there, but when he made approaches to her, she ran in the direction of the court, to seek protection under the king.

Kīchaka followed her there, grabbed her hair and kicked her right in the presence of the king and Yudhishtira. No one spoke a word.

Bhīma, who happened to come there by chance, burned with anger and wanted to kill Kīchaka with a tree. Yudhishtira warned Bhīma in a very subtle manner, saying, "Cook, this tree is not dried and is not fit to be used as firewood. The tree will be fit for use after one month."

Draupadī appealed to the king: "My lord, I have five gāndharva husbands, but at present they are unable to punish this man. I seek protection under you." The king remained quiet as he was afraid of Kīchaka. However, Yudhishtira tried to appease Draupadī by appealing to her in a veiled language, which only she could understand: "Your husbands probably think that this is not yet the time to be angry. They are under a curse and the curse will lift within a fortnight. Have patience till then." The Pāndava brothers could only be helpless spectators. They had to control their anger because they could not reveal their identity.

However, that very night, Draupadī approached Bhīma and lamented: "With five husbands, I am not having the happiness of a woman with a single husband. My sufferings are endless." Bhīma could not bear to see Draupadī

suffer such indignities. He promised to kill Kīchaka. Accordingly, they decided upon a plan.

Helpless as Draupadī was, she agreed to meet Kīchaka in some dancing hall but in darkness only. In the dim light, Kīchaka found not Sairandhrī but Bhīma, who strangled him and made him just a lump of flesh.

Sairandhrī gave out that one of her five gāndharva husbands had killed Kīchaka. In their wrath, Kīchaka's brothers bound Draupadī with Kīchaka's dead body and decided to burn her alive on the pyre. Draupadī wailed and cried, calling assumed names of her five husbands—Jaya, Jayesh, Vijaya, Jayatsena and Jayadbala—to come to her rescue. Bhīma once more came to her rescue. He reached the burning ground in time and with an uprooted tree he killed all the so-called 'Upakīchakas'.

The king was so frightened that he asked his queen to dispense with Sairandhrī's services immediately. With difficulty, the queen could be persuaded by Sairandhrī to retain her for some more time.

C. WHO KILLED KĪCHAKA? DURYODHANA'S SUSPICION:

When the news of Kīchaka's murder in a

single combat because of some woman reached Hastināpur, Duryodhana very much suspected that the killer could be only Bhīma and that the Pāndavas were hiding somewhere in the city of Virāta. He fondly imagined that if they were discovered before the thirteenth year was over, they could be compelled to spend another thirteen years in exile.

The Kauravas made a conspiracy with King Susharmā of Trigartadesha who happened to have strained relations with Virāta.

a. Invasion on Virātanagar from the South:

The forces of Trigartadesha attacked Virāta from the south. The king of Virāta was in despair because, after the death of Kīchaka, he had no other commander strong enough to lead his forces to victory. Yudhishtira offered his services, saying that though he was a sanyasi, he was an expert in warfare as well. He also suggested that cook Valāla, stable-keeper Damagranthī and cowherd Tantripāla could also prove helpful, as they were all good warriors. Virāta marched his troop against Susharmā but as ill luck would have it he was taken captive and his troops got scattered in all directions. It was then that Yudhishtira asked Bhīma to do something to get Virāta



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7. Arjuna, as Brāhannala, acting as the charioteer of Uttara Kumār, blew his conch and twanged the string of his bow. The Kauravas said: "This is the Gandiva; we have discovered Arjuna."

released. Bhīma could not fight openly as the thirteenth year was not yet over, but he managed to get Virāta released and take Susharmā captive.

b. Invasion from the North:

Virāta and his forces were still on the battle-field, when the news arrived from the north that Duryodhana had marched into the city and carried away Virāta's cattle. Only the youngest son of Virāta, named Uttara Kumāra, was in the capital but he was too young to lead the forces. However, he offered to march against the forces of the Kauravas. Arjuna, as Brihannāla, offered to act as his charioteer. On reaching the battle-field, when the young prince, Uttara Kumāra, saw the vast troops of the Kauravas, he got panic-stricken and tried to run away from the battle-field. At that crucial moment, Arjuna had no other alternative but to become an active participant in warfare. He gave his identity to the young prince, collected his arms from the tree, blew his famous conch, Devadatta, and twanged the string of his mighty Gāndīva.

The Kaurava warriors said to one another: "This is the Gāndīva. Arjuna is discovered." Bhīshma, however, pointed out that the stipulated period of thirteenth year had terminated a day

before. In the fierce fight that followed, Duryodhana's forces were repulsed and they retreated to Hastināpur. On the return journey from the battlefield to Virata's capital, Arjuna revealed the identity of his brothers and Draupadī to Uttara Kumāra.

D. THE PĀNDAVAS REVEALED THEMSELVES :

Meanwhile king Virāta, on return from the battle-field, learnt of the victory won by his youngest son. His joy knew no bounds.

Virāta and Yudhishtira sat down to play a game of dice. Virāta was greatly excited over his son's victory, while Yudhishtira was equally thrilled over Arjuna's success. While Virata said that he was proud of his son's victory, Yudhishtira tried to correct him by saying, "It was his good fortune that Brihannāla held the reins of Uttara Kumāra's chariot." Virāta was very unhappy on this comment of Yudhishtira and said, "You are insulting my son. Take care not to displease me again." Yudhishtira could not keep quiet. "Only Brihannāla could have achieved this victory," said he. Virāta lost his temper and hit Yudhishtira on his forehead with a dice. When blood oozed out of the wound, Sairandhrī rushed to wipe the brow of Yudhishtira with her garment and to stop bleeding. Virāta failed to understand why so much

fuss was being made over such a minor injury.

In the meantime, the prince entered the hall and was horrified to see Yudhishtira's face covered with blood. He said, "Who has committed this crime against this noblest of men?" He asked his father to seek forgiveness immediately. Brihannāla had followed the prince in the court, but deliberately the prince did not disclose who he was and just remarked that the victory was due to the divine help and the king would meet the divine person in a day or two.

Next day, when Virāta arrived in the court, he found Yudhishtira seated on the throne in royal robes, with Draupadī seated by his side and the other four brothers sitting around him. It was then that the Pāndavas revealed themselves. Virāta was deeply touched by the revelation. He fell on Yudhishtira's feet and sought forgiveness, saying, "My kingdom is yours. Forgive me for the indignities that you had to suffer in my palace." Then he looked smilingly towards Arjuna and said, "I will feel honoured if you accept your pupil, Uttarā, to be your wife." Arjuna said, "I cannot accept Uttarā as my wife. She has been my student and is like my daughter. I will accept her as my daughter-in-law, as bride for Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadrā and the nephew of Kṛishṇa."

The Pāṇḍavas moved to another town close by, named Upaplavya. A messenger arrived from Hastināpur with the words from Duryodhana: “Prepare yourselves to go again to the forest for a period of twelve years, because Arjuna was seen by us before the expiry of the thirteenth year.” Yudhishtira sent back the reply: “Let the grandsire, Bhīṣma, tell you, O Duryodhana, whether the thirteenth year had been completed or not, when Arjuna was seen by you.”

Kṛiṣṇa, Balarāma and all other rulers who loved the Pāṇḍavas arrived at Upaplavya to participate in the marriage of Abhimanyu with princess Uttarā. Those who were very close to the Pāṇḍavas stayed on to take part in the deliberations on the crucial question—“What action should the Pāṇḍavas take for restoration of their kingdom?”

Chapter V

UDYOGA PARVA

(PEACE MISSIONS)

A. THE COUNCIL AT VIRĀTANAGAR:

Before the guests, who had arrived at Virātānagar for the wedding of Abhimanyu and Uttarā, departed for their respective places, consultations were held among all the elders, princes and chieftains, who were the allies and well-wishers of the Pāṇḍavas, in the Assembly Hall of the king of Virāta, to decide upon the course to be adopted by the Pāṇḍavas to secure their kingdom. Kṛishṇa was the first to speak: "O kings and princes, you all know how Yudhishtira was cheated at the game-board by deceitful Shakuni and thus deprived of his kingdom. The Pāṇḍavas have endured great hardships in the twelve years' exile, followed by one year's incognito service as menials in the royal palace of the king of Virāt. Yudhishtira now rightly seeks peace and justice. This kingdom of the Kurus belongs to him. He has inherited it as his birthright. King Dhṛitrāshtra and his son, Duryodhana, know it well. One half of the kingdom,

given to Yudhishtira long ago and known as Indraprastha, was further enlarged through the valour of his brothers. He performed the Rājasūya yajna and a large number of rulers in Bhārata-varsha accepted his suzerainty. He lost the kingdom through no fault of his and has fulfilled the conditions laid down at the second game of dice. Duryodhana still burns with hate and jealousy. What steps should now be taken to right the wrong done to the Pāndavas? Should he send friendly messenger to Duryodhana, asking him to restore his kingdom or should he be prepared to wage war to punish his foes? I invite the opinions of all those who have assembled here. Yudhishtira and his brothers do not want war ; they are righteous people."

Balarāma supported Kṛishṇa to some extent: "It is true that the Pāndavas have suffered a lot at the hands of the Kauravas. But Yudhishtira has suffered because of his folly. It was unwise on his part to play against cunning Shakuni and to continue playing, despite all warnings by the elders. However, I would counsel peaceful settlement of the quarrel. Let a messenger be sent to Duryodhana, entreating him to restore the Indraprastha throne to Yudhishtira. What has been gambled away cannot be restored through

war. War must be avoided at all cost. I suggest that a highly diplomatic and clever ambassador be sent to Hastināpur on the peace mission.”

Sātyaki, the Yādava warrior and kinsman of Kṛishṇa, rose in anger and spoke indignantly, “O Balarāma, you have spoken like a woman. Timid words come from timid hearts. Proud monarchs do not heed such counsel. How can you justify what Duryodhana has done? How can you blame pious-hearted Yudhishtira? It was Duryodhana who plotted to ruin the Pāndavas. Yudhishtira has fulfilled his part of the conditions. His exile is over and he can justly claim restoration of his kingdom. I agree that fair opportunity be given to Duryodhana to restore the throne to Yudhishtira peacefully; otherwise let the Pāndavas secure justice on the battle-field. I have a strong feeling that not much can be achieved through messages and messengers.”

Drupada supported Sātyaki: “Soft words will have no effect on Duryodhana. It is useless to entreat him; he is a very stubborn fellow. We should not delay in gathering forces. In the meantime, let us offer peace and friendship to Duryodhana. But that is not the most important thing. The most important thing is to send messengers to the kings seeking their help in the war which

seems imminent. I am, however, prepared to send my priest on a peace mission to the court of Hastināpur.”

Kṛishṇa rose again and, addressing Drupada, said, “Your suggestion is very practicable. It shows great foresight and military understanding. It also conforms to the royal code. If Duryodhana agrees to restore the Indraprastha throne to Yudhishtira, there will be no war and bloodshed. Both the Pāndavas and the Kauravas are our kinsmen and are dear to us.”

The conference ended and Kṛishṇa and Balarāma left for Dwārikā.

Drupada sent his brāhmaṇa priest as the emissary of the Pāndavas to the court of Hastināpur. The Pāndavas and their allies began to prepare for war. They sent messengers to all powerful kings, asking them to side with the Pāndavas in case there was a war.

B. ARJUNA AND DURYODHANA AT DWĀRIKĀ:

Both Arjuna and Duryodhana rushed to Dwarikā to seek help of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma, in case there was a war. Duryodhana arrived earlier; Arjuna reached some time later. Kṛishṇa was asleep at that time. Both Arjuna and Duryodhana could gain entry in his bedroom. While Duryo-



8. Duryodhana and Arjuna sought help of Krishna in Dwārīka. Krishna said: "O Duryodhana, you may have come first but my eyes fell on Arjuna first."

dhana sat on a throne at the head of the bed, Arjuna stood at the foot with arms folded in respect. When Kṛishṇa awoke, his eyes first fell upon Arjuna and then turned towards Duryodhana.

Duryodhana was the first to speak: "War between the Pāṇdavas and the Kauravas may break any moment. We both claim relationship with you. I came here before Arjuna. I should be given preference."

Kṛishṇa answered, "O Duryodhana, you may have come first, but my eyes fell upon Arjuna first. Moreover, the younger of the two should be allowed to make the first choice. I would offer the first choice to Arjuna. On one side I offer my services ;I shall wield no weapons and take no part in actual fighting. On the other side, there will be the whole army of mine."

Arjuna said with reverence, "I will be happy if you are with us, though you may not wield any weapon." Duryodhana was extremely happy to receive the help of the entire army of Kṛishṇa.

Duryodhana also sought help of Balarāma, who said, "You have been a great favourite of mine and I spoke in your favour at the Council held at the city of Virāṭa. But my brother is siding with the Pāṇdavas and I cannot quarrel with him. I have no heart in this war and I will not participate in it.

However, it is true that you have wronged Yudhishtira and it would be better if you act justly in the matter." Duryodhana was unhappy with this reply of Balarāma.

C. DRUPADA'S PRIEST AS EMISSARY OF PEACE TO HASTINĀPUR:

In the meantime, Drupada's priest reached Hastināpur with Yudhishtira's message. The elders and the counsellors sat with Dhṛitrāshtra to hear the message.

Said the priest, "Dhṛitrāshtra and Pandu are both Vichitravīrya's sons and are equally entitled to have a share in the kingdom. Dhritrashtra's sons possess the whole kingdom, while the sons of Pāndu are denied inheritance. The Pāndavas have suffered a lot, but they have fulfilled the conditions. If their rightful claim is accepted, they will forget the past. If their claim is rejected, the Kauravas should be prepared for a bloody war."

Karṇa angrily replied, "If the Pāndavas have suffered, they themselves are to blame. If they prove the right to possession, Duryodhana will accept. O Brāhmaṇa, tell the Pāndavas that they have failed to fulfil the obligations as Arjuna was seen by us before the thirteenth year of

banishment was over. Let them return to the forest for another term. They can then come back and live as the subjects of Duryodhana.”

Bhīshma intervened: “Karna, you speak words that have no wisdom. If war comes, we are all doomed to destruction.” In the midst of confusion Dhṛitrāshtra had to intervene. He tried to pacify Bhīshma and rebuked Karna for his undiplomatic remarks. Then he asked the ambassador to return and tell Yudhishtira that he would soon be sending Sanjaya as his emissary for negotiations.

Drupada’s priest returned to Upaplavya and gave Yudhishtira a true account of the conversation he had at the court of Hastināpur. Yudhishtira waited anxiously for the arrival of Sanjaya.

D. SANJAYA’S PEACE MISSION:

When Sanjaya reached the camp of the Pāndavas, he found that they had already assembled a mighty army.

Said Yudhishtira, “Sanjaya, I hope you have brought some good news from Hastināpur.”

Replied Sanjaya, “King Dhṛitrāshtra sends you his best wishes. He desires your friendship and

yearns for peace. In the court of Hastināpur, there are good people and there are bad people. You have always been so righteous that King Dhṛitrāshtra can hardly have any illwill towards you."

Yudhishtira then answered: "I too desire peace and goodwill. If our kingdom is restored to us, we will wipe out all memories of sufferings we have undergone." Sanjaya spoke: "O Yudhishtira, your army is powerful and you may be victorious. The army of Duryodhana is equally invincible. You have been righteous all your life. You stand for good conduct. Let us eschew the evil of war. What good can we gain by killing our own kinsmen? Duryodhana and his brothers are fools, but you should not swerve from the path of righteousness." Yudhishtira replied: "Sanjaya, what you say is right. We honour Dhṛitrāshtra, but we fear he always listens to the ill advice given by his son, Duryodhana. The king offers us protection but not fulfilment of our claims. My uncle, your king, has only one thing in his mind—appeasement of his son, who is proud, arrogant and greedy. My honoured uncle tries to make out that I want war, while he is for peace. Is this not unfair?"

Kṛishna then spoke: "Sanjaya, you have seen that the Pāndavas have amassed a vast army.

Deliver unto the Kauravas the message: 'If you seek peace, you will have peace; if you seek war, let there be a war. Your king has no right to talk of Dharma. He is crying for peace, since he is afraid for his sons. We are crying out for peace, not because we are afraid for ourselves, but because we are afraid for the sons of Dhṛitrāshtra as well.'

Yudhishtira gave his final message to Sanjaya to be delivered at Hastināpur: "Give us back what belongs to us lawfully. We are five; for the five of us, give us at least five villages and make peace with us."

While Sanjaya was away at the court of Yudhishtira, King Dhṛitrāshtra consulted Vidura, who counselled: "To give to the Pāndavas their share in the kingdom is the safest. Fair dealings will be right as well as expedient."

When Sanjaya, on return, gave Yudhishtira's message to Dhṛitrāshtra, both Bhīshma and Droṇa counselled for peace, but Duryodhana refused to listen to talks of peace. When Dhṛitrāshtra pleaded that he should seek peace by giving away half of the kingdom, he scornfully replied: "The Pāndavas will not receive even a needle-point worth of territory." On listening to the advice given by the elders, Duryodhana lost his temper and said: "All those who are not willing to help me out in my

fighting against the Pāṇḍavas can leave. Three of us alone—I, Duhshāsana and Kārṇa can manage to rout the army of the Pāṇḍavas.”

E. KRISHṆA ON THE PEACE MISSION:

Yudhishtira was very much impressed by what Sanjaya had said about the sentiments of Dhṛitrāshtra, but he strongly felt that Dhṛitrāshtra was not playing a fair game with the Pāṇḍavas. Nevertheless, he still sought peace and was keen to avoid war. He very much desired that Kṛishṇa himself should go on a peace mission to the court of Hastināpur, though he feared it might be risky for his safety.

Kṛishṇa readily agreed to go on the peace mission: “I shall most willingly go to Hastināpur as your emissary. I shall try my best to secure your right without war.

If my mission succeeds, it is for the good of humanity. We must omit nothing, no matter how slender our hopes for peace be. Have no fears for my safety, for I go as a messenger of peace. Signs are ominous and there may be a war, but duty demands that we make the last attempt to gain peace.”

When Kṛishṇa was about to depart for Hastināpur, Draupadī entered the court and,

addressing Kṛishṇa, said: "Yudhishtira is too generous towards the Kauravas. Can it be forgotten that Duhshāsana dishonoured me publicly and I was put to shame in the presence of the elders?" Kṛishṇa counselled patience to Draupadī.

On arrival at Hastināpur, Kṛishṇa was well received by the elders. Kṛishṇa stayed with Vidura, but went to the house of Duryodhana to have some preliminary talks. He only proved to be haughty and arrogant in his attitude. When the elders sat with Dhṛitrāshtra to hear Kṛishṇa, he said: "O Dhṛitrāshtra, stretch your hand of peace and avert the dreadful calamity. Grant unto the Pāndavas their rightful claim and let the last years of your life be peaceful."

F. DEFIANT DURYODHANA:

Dhṛitrāshtra only wept for he was helpless against Duryodhana. Both Bhīshma and Droṇa spoke to Duryodhana: "Do not be so certain of victory. Do not bring eternal sorrow to your aged parents." Vidura also gave him similar advice in a very soft tone: "I grieve not for thee, but for your aged parents. I grieve for those kinsmen who will die in battle." Dhṛitrāshtra only wept.

Duryodhana listened to all scornfully. Looking towards Kṛishṇa, he said in the most defiant tone : “You counsel me to be just, though you hate me and love the Pāṇdavas; Bhīshma always scowls upon me; Droṇa and Vidura condemn me; and my sire weeps for my sins. It appears that I am to blame for everything. My only fault is that I am firm and plain. O Kṛishṇa, tell the Pāṇdavas that I will not humble myself before the Pāṇdavas.” Duryodhana left the council chamber along with Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karṇa. Kṛishṇa turned towards Dhṛitrāshtra and even suggested that the four rebellious princes be arrested and that he (Dhṛitrāshtra), on his own, should act justly towards the Pāṇdavas.

Dhṛitrāshtra then called Gāndhārī to the court. Duryodhana was summoned to the council chamber. He only stood with a defiant frown on his face. Without saying a word in reply to the advice given by Gāndhārī, he walked out of the council chamber.

G. KRISHNA'S VISHWAROOP:

Duryodhana went straight to have counsel with Duhshāsana, Shakuni and Karṇa. Fearing that they themselves might be arrested, on the advice of Kṛishṇa, and handed over to Yudhish-

thira, they decided on a counter-plot to make Kṛishṇa captive. Sātyaki, who came to know of this plot, rushed to inform Kṛishṇa in the council chamber. When Dhṛitrāshtra learnt of this vile design of his son and his accomplices, he was horrified. He called Duryodhana and rebuked him by saying: "Kṛishṇa is an ambassador. He is our kinsman. It is a sin to arrest an ambassador of peace." Duryodhana only laughed.

Then Kṛishṇa revealed himself in divine splendour. His body was transformed into a tongue of flame; fire issued from his mouth, ears and eyes; sparks came forth from his skin which became radiant as the Sun. On the forehead could be seen Brahmā, on the chest the nine Rudras, and other gods surrounded all over. All those in the council chamber closed their eyes, but Duryodhana continued to stand defiant. Even Dhṛitrāshtra was endowed with divine vision at that moment to see the real self of Lord Kṛishṇa.

H. FAILURE OF PEACE MISSION:

Kṛishṇa's peace mission failed and he departed for Upaplavya.

a. Kṛishṇa talked to Karna:

Before leaving Hastināpur, Kṛishṇa thought it worthwhile to have a word with Karna. He tried to

dissuade him from following the sinful path of remaining with the Kauravas, but Karṇa refused to change his loyalties. "I have only two people who love me and they are Duryodhana and my mother, Rādhā," said Karṇa. Kṛishṇa remained silent for some time and then talking about his parentage, informed him that his mother was Kuntī and that the five Pāṇdavas were his brothers. Karṇa gasped out and tears flowed from his eyes. "How I wished I had known it earlier!" said Karṇa. He knew well that calamity awaited the Kauravas, yet he could not desert those who had given him their love. "I must fight for my friends, though I may be slain in the war," was his firm reply.

b. Kuntī talked to Karṇa:

Knowing that war was imminent and that brother would thirst for the blood of brother, Kuntī sighed and wept and went to see Karṇa, lamenting the folly of her girlhood. "You are my son, O Karṇa, and Sūrya (Sun) is your father. Come back to me and join hands with Arjuna," said Kuntī. But Karṇa excused himself by saying, "Mother, it is now too late to win my support. You have never been mother to me, nor do your sons regard me as their elder brother. How can I desert the Kauravas at this stage when they have put so

much trust in me so far... I have power to slay Yudhishtira, Bhīma, Nakula and Sahadeva but I promise to spare them. I will, however, fight with Arjuna. If I slay him, I will achieve fame; if I am slain by him, I will be covered with glory.”

Chapter VI

BHĪSHMA PARVA

(BHĪSHMA AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER
OF THE KAURAVA FORCES)

A. INTRODUCTION

a. The Supreme Commanders

Out of the eighteen parvas in the Mahābhārata, four are devoted to the war between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas. These are Bhīshma Parva, Droṇa Parva, Karṇa Parva and Shalya Parva, after the names of four warriors who commanded the Kaurava forces in succession, one after another. Bhīshma commanded the forces for the first ten days, Droṇa for the next five days, Karna for another two days and Shalya on the last day, the battle lasting eighteen days in all.

In the Pāndava camp, various suggestions were made as to who should command the Pāndava forces. Names of Virāta and Drupada were also suggested but finally Drupada's son, Dhṛishtadyumna, was selected as the Supreme Commander. He continued to command for all the eighteen days.

The Kauravas had eleven akshauhini (Divisions) of army, while the Pāndavas had only seven. Each akshauhini consisted of 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses and 1,09,350 foot-soldiers.

b. The Code of Honour :

The warriors on both the sides met and agreed to honour certain traditional rules of war. Everyday the battle was to end at sunset and thereafter the hostiles could meet freely like friends. Single combats took place only among equals. For example, a fight could be between two chariots or two horsemen or two mace-holders. A horseman could attack only a horseman and not a foot-soldier. Those who left the field or retired were not to be attacked. Those who surrendered out of fear were not to be attacked. It was considered sinful to slay one who was disarmed or who was retreating or who had lost his armour. No arrows were to be directed towards the non-combatants or those who were engaged for blowing conches or for beating drums. At times, of course, these established conventions were broken by the highest and the noblest, but such violations were very few and were looked upon as wrong.

Such actions became part of the strategy of war (Yuddha Nīti), as distinct from the code of morality (Dharma Nīti).

In the latter days of the battle, many savage and hideous deeds were committed. The poet comments that, while there is an innate nobility in man, in the midst of temptations he becomes too weak to resist, especially if he is in the grip of hatred and jealousy. Then he does not hesitate to commit most heinous crimes.

c. The Account of War:

A hight before the commencement of the battle, Vyāsa offered to bestow eyesight on Dhṛitrāshtra, if he wanted to watch the fighting. Dhṛitrāshtra, however, shuddered at the very idea of watching the killing of kith and kin with his own eyes. However, he expressed willingness to hear about the events of war from some reliable person. Vyāsa granted inner sight to Sanjaya. The account of war from the beginning to the end has been given in the words of Sanjaya as he related the events to Dhṛitrāshtra. Vyāsa has described the battle very exhaustively in the Mahābhārata. In the vivid scenes he even states who fought with whom each day, how they fought, what weapons they used and

who died and how. At places he even tells us how many arrows were discharged by a particular warrior against his opponent on a particular occasion. [A kind of highly advanced cathode ray tube (CRT) display television technology might have enabled Sanjaya to see live telecast and projected in the chamber the events as they look place on the battlefield. -Ed.]

Vyāsa, or later Vyāsas, have gifted the warriors with semi-divine qualities, armed with celestial weapons. What would seem otherwise incredible for a mortal being is not only made possible but considered quite normal, when enacted by a demi-god hero. Arjuna, could kill five hundred warriors simultaneously or cover the whole battlefield with the dead and fill rivers with blood. Bhīma could annihilate an elephant along with all mounted on it with one blow of his mace.

There are references to strange types of weapons used, such as pot containing snakes, wooden pieces covered with poison, stone-throwing machines or strings thrown to hook the enemy's neck.

d. Before the Commencement of the War:

On the evening before the commencement of the battle, Duryodhana sent Ulūka, son of

Shakuni, as a messenger, with individual messages to all the Pāṇḍava brothers and Kṛishṇa, reminding them of the oaths they had taken some fourteen years before, and to fulfil them on the battlefield. It was a challenge thrown to the Pāṇḍavas with a warning that they were all going to be killed and that they should be ready to meet their Maker soon.

Back was delivered the reply that the oaths were not to be repeated, but that they would do what they had sworn earlier to do.

While Duryodhana was confident that with such an invincible commander as Bhīshma, the war should be over in a day or two, Yudhishtira spent a sleepless night, being unhappy at the thought of killing kith and kin: "I suffered thirteen years of exile to avoid the bloody war. How will we fight to kill those elders whom we have honoured all these years?" Kṛishṇa and Arjuna comforted him: "The war has been forced upon us. There is no going back. We have no option."

e. On the Battle-field:

On the morning, at red dawn, the armies of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas were assembled by the commanders on the vast plains of Kurukshetra

in the north-west of Indraprastha, to decide the dispute between the two hostile camps of the cousins through a battle in place of peaceful negotiations. The gods of destruction had so decreed. After merciless killing for eighteen days, only ten persons survived—the five Pāndava brothers, Kṛishṇa and Sātyaki on the Pāndavas' side and Kṛipacharya, Kṛitivarman and Ashwatthama on the Kauravas' side.

Each eminent warrior had his own standard. On Bhīshma's flag shone the palm tree with five stars. On Droṇa's golden-hued standard there was the ascetic's bowl and bow. Duryodhana's banner had a cobra with raised hood. Kṛipachārya's flag carried a bull, while that of Ashwatthāmā had a lion tail fluttering in the air.

Some eminent warriors had their own conch-shells for a trumpet. Arjuna blew his conch, called Devadatta. Kṛishṇa sounded a shell made out of the bones of a demon Panchajana and hence called Pāñchajanya. Bhīma's trumpet was called Paundra and Yudhishthira sounded his, named Anantavijaya. When the battle commenced, a tumult filled the sky and the earth shook. Awful portents

occurred; there were showers of blood; asses were born of cows, calves of mare and jackals of dogs. Kites, vultures and jackals hung around the rear of the marching armies, screaming hungrily for human flesh. Thunder roared in the cloudless sky. Then darkness prevailed, lightning flashed and meteors showed across pitch dark sky. The poet describes the battle scene thus: "Trumpets were blown and kettle drums were beaten. Monstrous elephants trampled upon men and horses; clubs and maces clashed like thunder; swords were wielded and javelins hurled; rattling chariots dashed against one-another; and thousands of arrows hurtled through the air at terrific speed, darkening the sky. There was destruction, carnage and death everywhere. Gods assembled in the clouds to watch mutual slaughter of kinsmen.

B. YUDHISHTHIRA SOUGHT THE BLESSINGS OF THE ELDERS:

At that tense moment, when the battle was about to commence, Yudhishtira, all of a sudden, put off his armour, cast aside his weapons and, descending from his chariot, proceeded on foot towards the Commander of the Kaurava forces. Everyone just wondered at



9. Yudhishthira seeking blessings of Bhishma before commencement of Kurukshetra.

this strange behaviour of Yudhishtira. Arjuna and other brothers feared that perhaps Yudhishtira, in his weak moments, had decided to make peace at any terms. They ran up to him to enquire what he was going to do. Yudhishtira, just immersed in his thoughts, proceeded on.

The people in Duryodhana's camp thought that Yudhishtira had got frightened after seeing the vast armies of the Kauravas and was approaching Bhīshma to sue for peace.

Yudhishtira went straight through the armed forces of the enemy lines ready for launching the invasion and reached the chariot of Bhīshma. There, bending low and touching Bhīshma's feet in reverence, he said: "Grand-sire, permit us to commence the battle. We seek your blessings before beginning the fight." Bhīshma replied: "Fight and you will have victory. I am not free and am bound by my obligations to the king. Your cause is just and you cannot be defeated."

Next, Yudhishtira approached Droṇachārya and sought his blessings as well. He also approached Kṛipachārya and Shalya for obtaining similar blessings. Thereafter he returned to the Pāṇḍava camp.

C. ARJUNA'S DEPRESSION AND KṚISHṆA'S SERMON:

Meanwhile, Arjuna asked Kṛishṇa, who had agreed to become his charioteer, to drive the chariot to the open space in between the two hostile camps. Arjuna surveyed the two sides and he saw his kinsmen and friends on either side ready to fall upon one another. He was deeply moved and spoke to Kṛishṇa: "I seek neither victory, nor kingdom, nor any worldly pleasures. What pleasure shall I enjoy after slaying my own kinsmen?" He dropped his celestial bow and sat down in a depressed mood.

a. The Bhagwad-Gītā:

This was the occasion when Kṛishṇa delivered his famous sermon which, in the Hindu scriptures, is known as Shrīmad Bhagwadgītā. The Bhagwadgītā is a dramatic poem or a dialogue between two important personages—Kṛishṇa and Arjuna. When Arjuna made a sudden resolution to retire from the combat, he confided his thoughts to Kṛishṇa, who revealed himself to Arjuna in his celestial splendour and commanded him to do his duty



10. Krishna's message to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra: "Let the Act's motive be in the Act itself."

which was to fight for the rightful cause, no matter what might befall him or others.

Arjuna thus confided his thoughts to Kṛishṇa: "When I behold my kinsmen all arrayed in lines of battles preparing for the deadly fight, my limbs weaken, my blood dries up, tremor shakes my body, hair upon my skin bristle with fear, all my body burns as if with fever and my mind whirls round. I cannot stand upright and cannot hold the Gāṇḍīva."

Kṛishṇa's philosophical and theological discourse given to Arjuna is acknowledged by all, as one of the supreme treasures of human literature of all times and of all civilizations. The gospel of devotion to duty without any attachment or desire of reward has shown the right way of life to all mankind. The Bhagwad-gītā is a long sermon, divided into three sections, each containing six chapters.

Kṛishṇa's main emphasis was on Action: "Perform all necessary acts, for action is better than inaction. None can live by sitting still and doing nothing. Yet, in working, never work for compensation and return. Let the Act's motive be in the Act itself."

b. Kṛishṇa's Celestial Vision

After long instructions Kṛishṇa revealed his real self to Arjuna: "Let thy heart and thine understanding be fixed in me. Think thou on me, have faith in me and worship me and thou shalt come to me and I am in them. I am the same unto all creatures; there is none hateful to me and none dear. Those who hate me are consigned to evil births."

When Arjuna saw the celestial vision (Vishwa Roopa) of Kṛishṇa, he bowed his head and, folding his hands in reverence, gave utterance to his adoration thus: "I see thee, O Lord, revealed in forms of infinite diversity. I see thee like a mass of purest light, flashing its lustre all around. O eternal one, I behold your glory. My conscience is clear and I will do thy bidding and fight without questioning and without fear."

D. BHĪSHMA'S SUPREME COMMAND OF THE KAURAVA FORCES:

Bhīshma, the grandsire of both the Pāndavas and the Kauravas, had agreed to be the Supreme Commander of the Kaurava forces, but he was equally attached to the Pāndava

princes since childhood. On taking over the charge, he made one point very clear to Duryodhana: "The sons of Pāndu are as dear to me as you are and I will not kill any one of them. The war does not have my approval but short of killing the Pāndavas I will discharge all my obligations sincerely." Bhīshma also said to Duryodhana: "I am opposed to the idea of Karṇa and if you so desire, you may appoint Karṇa as the supreme commander.

Karna assured Bhīshma that he would keep out of war as long as Bhīshma was the commander. In his usual boastful manner he declared: "My sworn enemy is Arjuna and I am determined to kill him."

a. The First Day:

(The Pāndava Army badly shaken)

In the very forenoon of the first day's battle, the Pāndava forces suffered very heavily. In whatever direction Bhīshma's chariot moved, it was 'like the dance of the destroyer'. He literally cut a blood-red path through the fear-stricken Pāndava legions.

Abhimanyu took up the challenge. It became a confrontation between the youngest and the oldest. From his chariot (displaying the

golden karnikara tree standard) the young warrior shot at least nine arrows which pierced Bhīshma, who exclaimed: "Indeed, a worth son of Arjuna!" The Kaurava warriors made a combined attack on the brave youth but he stood firm against all of them. One of his arrows brought down the palm tree standard of Bhīshma, which further overjoyed Bhīshma who used his skill as an archer against young boy most unwillingly. Several Pāndava princes arrived to relieve Abhimanyu. Two sons of Virāta, Uttara and Sveta, lost their lives in trying to protect him. By evening, the hostile forces retired.

b. The Second Day:

(Duryodhana's Confidence shaken)

Next day Dhṛishtadyumna took measures to avoid the repetition of the previous day's onslaught. But Bhīshma once more broke through the Pāndavas' formation. Arjuna succeeded in driving him back. He wielded his Gāndīva admirably. In another sector, a fierce battle took place between Droṇa and Dhṛish-tadyumna, who was badly wounded but who retaliated with great vigour. His bow was broken and his charioteer was killed. Then he took up

the mace and when Droṇa's arrows brought down the mace, he took up his sword. At this crucial moment Bhīma arrived to his help and took him away in his chariot. Kalinga forces tried to intervene, but Bhīma slaughtered a number of them. When Bhīshma rushed to help the Kalinga forces, Sātyaki's arrows brought down his charioteer. The horses of Bhīshma's chariot broke wild and bolted, carrying Bhīshma away from the battlefield.

As the sun set, it was the end of the day's battle. Duryodhana's confidence in Bhīshma began to shake. He had thought that under Bhīshma's leadership war would end in a day or two with total destruction of the Pāṇḍava forces. On the second day, the Kaurava forces suffered heavy losses.

c. The Third Day:

("I shall kill Bhīshma if you don't do so.")

On the third day the forces of Kauravas again suffered heavy losses.

Bhīma and his son, Ghatotkacha, attacked Duryodhana and he lay unconscious in his chariot. The charioteer hurriedly led the chariot away. This created panic in the Kaurava forces. Bhīma took advantage of the confusion and

caused havoc among the fleeing Kaurava forces. With difficulty, Droṇa and Bhīshma could succeed in restoring confidence. Meanwhile, Duryodhana also arrived to lead his forces.

Duryodhana accused Bhīshma of being too kind towards the Pāṇdavas. Bhīshma smiled and said, "I am doing my duty to you with all my might, but I am an old man." Thereafter the grandsire moved about 'like a whirling firebrand'. Kṛishṇa then said to Arjuna: "Now is the testing time to see that you do not flinch from duty. You have taken a pledge and you must fulfil the same." When Kṛishṇa felt that Arjuna's heart was not in the battle, he lost his temper. "I shall kill Bhīshma myself if you do not do that," said Kṛishṇa. He got down from the chariot, took up his discus and rushed towards Bhīshma. Bhīshma was not perturbed at all; rather he welcomed to be slain by Kṛishṇa, for thus would he be 'glorified in the three world'. Arjuna jumped down from the chariot and entreated Kṛishṇa to come back. Thereafter, Arjuna attacked the Kaurava forces furiously and thousands were slain. Everyone remarked: "Who can equal Arjuna?"



11. Krishna lost his temper when he found that Arjuna's heart was not in the battle: "I shall kill Bhishma myself, if you do not do that."

d. The Fourth Day: (Bhīma, the Hero)

On the fourth day, Bhīma was the hero. He wounded Shalya and Duryodhana. When fourteen brothers of Duryodhana rushed at him, Bhīma stood like a rock undisturbed and easily killed eight of them in a short time. The remaining six fled away in terror.

Towards the evening one arrow of Duryodhana hit Bhīma on his chest and he reeled and almost fainted. His son, Ghatotkacha, rushed to his help and fell furiously on the Kaurava forces.

Lamentation of Dhṛitrāshtra:

Dhṛitrāshtra exclaimed: "Sanjaya every day you give me nothing but bad news of my men being slain and my son being defeated. I cannot stand it any more."

Sanjaya coolly replied: "Of what avail is grief now? How can I concoct good news for you? Is it not the result of your own folly?"

Thereafter, whenever Sanjaya related the happenings of the great battle, Dhṛitrāshtra only burst into tears and lamented, unable to bear the grief. Sanjaya tried to calm him by saying, "The cause of the Pāndavas is just and

they are fighting according to the rules of the war. Vidura, Bhīshma and I tried to stop you from this unwise course, but you did not listen to us. You ignored our wise counsel and hence this calamity has befallen you.”

e. The Fifth Day:

On the fifth day of the great battle, Droṇa and Bhīshma made combined attacks on Bhīma. Shikhandin arrived to help Bhīma and Bhīshma turned away, as Shikhandin was born a girl and had changed sex later. Droṇa poured a shower of arrows on him and he had to withdraw.

On this day, ten sons of Sātyaki were slain but Bhīma took away Sātyaki by force in his chariot and thus saved him.

f. The Sixth Day:

(The Day of Peril for Bhīma)

The sixth day was a day of great peril for Bhīma. He pierced through the enemy forces to seek more brothers of Duryodhana and kill them. Suddenly he lost patience and asked his charioteer to stay behind, while he got down and advanced on foot into the enemy lines. When Dhṛishtadyumna saw this, he rushed to his help and, finding him surrounded by a

number of warriors in their chariots, carried him away in his chariot, but they failed to retreat. Duryodhana ordered a combined attack on the two retreating people. Timely arrival of Abhimanyu saved both of them.

Droṇa killed Dhṛishtadyumna's charioteer and horses and smashed his chariot but Abhimanyu managed to rescue both Bhīma and Dhṛishtadyumna.

g. The Seventh Day: (The Day of Bhīshma)

The seventh day of the battle was the day of Bhīshma. Duryodhana approached the grand-sire early in the morning and complained: "All our formations are broken and our warriors are being slain in large numbers. You are just looking on and doing nothing." Bhīshma cheered up Duryodhana. That day none could withstand Bhīshma in his fury. Even Arjuna failed to keep him in check. The old warrior continued to hold out against all five Pāṇdavas till the sun set. The battle was, however, fought fiercely in various sectors. Droṇa and Virāṭa were engaged in one sector. Two sons of Virāṭa were killed on the very first day. On the seventh day, he lost his third son as well.

Shalya attacked his nephews, Nakula and Sahadeva. Nakula's horses were killed and he had to join Sahadeva, whose arrows pierced Shalya and he became unconscious. His charioteer managed to drive away the chariot.

Dhṛishtadyumna and Duryodhana fought in another sector. The horses of Duryodhana's chariot were killed, but Shakuni took him away in his chariot.

Abhimanyu inflicted severe defeat on three brothers of Duryodhana but spared them, as Bhīma had sworn to kill them.

h. The Eighth Day:

On the eighth day, Bhīshma arrayed his forces in a tortoise formation. Dhṛishtadyumna arrayed his forces for a three-pronged attack, with Bhīma, Sātyaki and Yudhishtira commanding the three prongs.

The tide of the battle once again turned into the favour of the Pāndavas. As Bhīshma advanced, his charioteer was slain and the horses took to flight in terror. The Kaurava army was totally demoralised.

Six sons of Dhritrāshtra advanced, determined to kill Irāwata, son of Arjuna, who killed

five of them, though the sixth one succeeded in killing Irāwata. When Arjuna came to know of it, with tear-dimmed eyes he advanced against the enemy thirsting for revenge. Bhīma and his son, Ghatotkacha, also fell upon the enemy forces. Ghatotkacha hurled a javelin which would have very nearly killed Duryodhana but the Vanga chief intervened and Duryodhana was saved.

Duryodhana was stricken with sorrow and he approached Bhīshma, speaking rather harsh words which were like sharp spears and pained the grandsire enormously. Said he, "Your love for the Pāndavas prevents you from overcoming them. Let Karṇa take over so that he may lead us to victory."

Bhīshma replied, "Why do you seek to mortify me when I have been doing my utmost for you. Alas, your struggle is of no avail; the just cause must win. I will fight as I have fought so far until my end comes, which is not far off."

i. The Ninth Day: (Bhīshma as the Forest Fire)

It was the day when Bhīshma acted 'like fire which burns up drying and withering forest'. Great was the carnage wrought by him. The

Pāṇḍava forces were greatly demoralised. Kṛishṇa took Arjuna close to Bhīshma's chariot and advised him to kill Bhishma without mercy. Again when he felt that Arjuna did not have his heart in fighting, he jumped out of chariot, took the discus in his hand and rushed at Bhishma. Bhīshma was again happy to be killed at the hands of Kṛishṇa. Everyone shouted: "Bhīshma is killed! Bhīshma is killed!" Arjuna got down from the chariot and fell at the feet of Kṛishṇa and said, "I do not want a stigma on your pure name. I swear in the name of the truth that henceforth I will not be false to my promise." Thus, the cloud of affection was lifted from Arjuna's mind. Kṛishṇa suggested that Arjuna might take cover behind Shikhandin and kill Bhīshma. But Arjuna would not agree to kill the Grandsire by such foul means. Kṛishṇa said: "It is fated that Bhīshma falls tomorrow. He has fought against those whom he loves; there is nothing wrong if you fight against him and kill him."

In the evening, all the Pāṇḍava brothers and Kṛishṇa went to the tent of Bhīshma, who welcomed them. Yudhishtira said, "Grandsire, how can we win this war? Like a forest fire, you



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12. Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows and asked for a pillow. Arjuna gave him a pillow with three arrows and, striking the ground with an arrow, gave him a spring of fresh water.

are destroying our army. I hate to think of you as dead but unless you are killed, we cannot win war.”

Bhīshma said to Arjuna, “Kill me tomorrow. No one can kill me while I am fighting. If you find me laying arms aside, you can certainly kill me. If you fight against me by taking cover behind Shikhandin, I will have to lay down my arms. This is the time when you can kill me with your arrows.”

j. The Tenth Day: (Bhīshma’s Fall)

On the tenth day of fighting, Arjuna willy nilly agreed to take cover behind Shikhandin, who accosted Bhīshma and challenged him. Bhīshma turned his face and laid aside his weapons. Shikhandin sent five sharp arrows at Bhīshma. All the Pāndava warriors surrounded the chariot of Bhīshma. Sātyaki, Abhimanyu and Dhṛishtadyumna were determined to keep the Kaurava warriors away. On the other hand, Duryodhana sensed the danger that threatened Bhīshma. He tried to get all his best warriors to guard Bhīshma. Then arrows started coming from the Gāndīva. “These are the arrows of

Arjuna; these are not the arrows of Shikhandin,' said Bhīshma.

Bhīshma fell from the chariot, though his body did not touch the ground, surrounded as it was by countless arrows. Bhīshma did not die immediately. As he was divinely gifted to fix the time of his death, he announced that he would retain life till the Sun entered the summer solstice (Uttarāyana). Fighting ceased for the time being. All warriors assembled to pay homage to the dying hero. As he lay on his bed of arrows, he asked for a pillow. Someone brought a soft support which the hardy old soldier refused to accept. Arjuna then gave him a pillow with three arrows. Later, when Bhīshma asked Arjuna to bring him water to drink, Arjuna struck the ground with an arrow and forthwith gushed forth a spring of water, which refreshed Bhīshma.

Bhīshma called forth Duryodhana and, in a long speech, advised him thus: "Hear the counsel of the old man. Restore to Yudhishtira his kingdom and make peace with him. Let the Pāndavas and the Kauravas be friends." Unfortunately, these words had no effect on Duryodhana; in fact, he began to hate the Pāndavas still more.

Bhīshma also advised Karna, "You are the son of Kuntī and the Sun-god. As Arjuna is your brother, it will be better for you to bring about an end to this war." Karna continued to have thirst for Arjuna's blood.

CHAPTER VII

DRONA PARVA

(DRONA AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER)

A. DRONA, THE NEXT SUPREME COMMANDER

The Kauravas held a Council of War to decide who should be the next Supreme Commander of the Kaurava forces. There were a number of warriors of equal skill, valour, ancestry and wisdom. The fear was that if any one of these was chosen as the Supreme Commander, others would feel hurt and would not fight wholeheartedly for the cause of the Kauravas. It was, therefore, decided that Droṇāchārya, who had been the teacher of quite a few warriors, should be chosen as the next Supreme Commander.

Duryodhana approached Droṇāchārya and addressed him thus: "You are an unrivalled warrior from all respects and I request you to accept the Supreme Command. Under your command we are confident to defeat the Pāndavas."

Droṇāchārya was installed as the Supreme Commander amidst loud applause by all the Kauravas. Most of them had been under the impression that Bhīshma, having a soft corner for the Pāṇdavas, had failed to put his whole heart in fighting. Quite a few warriors were doubtful if Droṇāchārya too would agree to slay any one of the Pāṇdava princes.

However, Karṇa, who had so far kept aloof for the first ten days of the battle, when Bhīshma was the commander, was seen moving about in his chariot on the battlefield. This greatly encouraged the Kaurava forces.

Droṇāchārya remained in command of the Kaurava forces for five days. He was quite aged, but he had the energy equal to any other young warrior. He personally fought against most of the noted warriors on the side of the Pāṇdavas, such as Sātyaki, Drupada, Bhīma, Arjuna, Abhimanyu, Dhṛishtadyumna and others and unnerved them on many occasions.

B. THE PLANS TO CAPTURE YUDHISHTHIRA :

Duryodhana, Karṇa and Duhshāsana decided upon a new strategy. Duryodhana

approached Droṇa with a strange request: "We desire that you capture Yudhishtira alive and hand him over to us. We want nothing more, not even a total victory." Droṇāchārya was happy to learn that at least he would not be required to slay any of the Pāṇḍava princes. He got the impression that Duryodhana's fraternal affections had overcome his base desires and perhaps after the arrest of Yudhishtira, the Pāṇḍavas would be considered to have been defeated and then Duryodhana might give Yudhishtira, on his own, his share in the kingdom and thus establish harmonious relations with the Pāṇḍavas.

Later, when Droṇāchārya came to know the real motive behind this new strategy, he condemned Duryodhana for nursing such base ideas. Duryodhana actually thought that even if Yudhishtira was killed, the war might not end and the other Pāṇḍava brothers might wage war more ferociously. However, if Yudhishtira was arrested alive, they could play upon his good nature and might even succeed in persuading him to have another game of dice and thus find it easier to send the Pāṇḍavas once again to the forest. Droṇāchārya, nevertheless, took a

solemn vow to seize Yudhishtira alive. The Āchārya was happy that at least he would not be required to commit the sin of slaying any of the Pāndava pupils.

The news of Droṇāchārya's vow reached the Pāndava camp through the spies. Thereafter, the Pāndavas so arranged their forces everyday that Yudhishtira was never left alone and unsupported. Despite his best efforts, Droṇāchārya failed to fulfil his vow.

a. The First Day:

On the first day of his command, Droṇa proved that he was a skilful commander. He could be seen everywhere on the battlefield as if it was a 'stage for the dance of the God of Death'. There were quite a few single combats under the noted warriors. In most of these, the Kaurava warriors seemed to lose. Dronacharya led a direct attack on Yudhishtira, but Dhṛishtadyumna intervened. Droṇa came so close to Yudhishtira that the people began to shout that 'Yudhishtira was arrested'.

All of a sudden, Arjuna arrived on the scene and Droṇāchārya was forced to withdraw. The Sun set in the west and Droṇa failed to fulfil his vow.

b. The Second Day:

On the second day of his command, Droṇāchārya's strategy right from the morning was to draw Arjuna away to some distant part of the battlefield and, thus, get Yudhishtira isolated.

Susharmā, the chief of the Trigartadesha, who had earlier attacked the capital of Virāta, when the Pāndavas were working incognito in his palace, offered his services for this purpose. He, along with his brothers, took the oath and challenged Arjuna.

Arjuna was in two moods: should he stay by the side of his brother, Yudhishtira, or accept the challenge. He sought his brother's permission to accept the challenge and promised that he would return after destroying the forces of Trigartadesha in no time. The Trigartadesha brothers took away Arjuna to a distance but Arjuna fought a ferocious battle. The Trigartadesha forces were easily demoralised, though Susharmā somehow kept up their morale high with warlike exhortations.

While Arjuna was led away by the Trigartadesha forces, Droṇa made a violent assault to reach Yudhishtira. Dhṛishtadyumna

watched this and, on his own, advanced to meet Drona, who had a psychological fear of this prince of Pāṇchāla as the one on whose hands he feared he was destined to meet his death. Drona then turned in another direction where Drupada was leading the forces. Drupada suffered a great deal at the hands of the Āchārya. Two Pāṇchāla princes and quite a few other warriors lost their lives in this confusion. Once more Drona reached very close to Yudhishtira. Duryodhana had full hopes that Yudhishtira would be positively arrested. But, then, several Pandava leaders arrived to see that Yudhishtira was safe. In fact, tables seemed to be turned. Duryodhana began to have a feeling that it was Droṇāchārya who needed support against the combined attack of the Pāṇḍava warriors. Bhagadatta, the king of Prāgjotisha, with his renowned elephant, named Supratika, charged against Bhīma. The mighty elephant twirled its great trunk and crushed Bhīma's chariot. Fortunately, Bhīma succeeded in escaping unhurt and took shelter between the two legs of the elephant, who once more tried to catch Bhīma with its trunk and crush him under its feet. The Pāṇḍava forces feared that Bhīma was perhaps crushed, but he emerged safe from

under the elephant. This elephant of Bhagadatta caused a lot of havoc, crushing warriors mercilessly.

Arjuna, who had been busy punishing the Trigartadesha forces, realised in the meantime that he must proceed to the support of his brother. It was a fierce combat between Arjuna and Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta charged Arjuna with his elephant's goad, which was charged with a Vaishnava mantra. It would have positively killed Arjuna, but Kṛishṇa intervened, and the goad settled on his chest as a necklace. Thereafter, neither Bhagadatta was invincible, nor his elephant. Arjuna sent an arrow which hit the elephant's head and it fell down with a cry. Another arrow of Arjuna pierced the chest of Bhagadatta and he died. Droṇa failed to fulfil his vow even on the second day.

c. The Third Day:

(Abhimanyu's Triumph & Fall)

On the third day of his command, Droṇa arrayed his forces as a spider's web and again planned that the Trigartadesha warriors should challenge Arjuna and take him away to a distance.

Duryodhana accused Droṇa of insincerity thus: “Yudhishtira was so close to you and yet you failed to capture him. How the actions of the great are ununderstandable!” Droṇāchārya felt badly hurt and explained: “I am doing my very best and yet you entertain such unworthy thoughts. As long as Arjuna is near Yudhishtira to support him, it is impossible for us to execute our plans.”

The Trigartadesha warriors again challenged Arjuna and took him away far to the south of the battle-field.

Quickly Droṇa arranged the Kaurava forces in the lotus formation (Padma Vyūha). Bhīma, Dhrishtadyumna, Drupada, Sātyaki and others tried their best to interfere with Droṇa's work when he was reorganising the forces but failed. They found it difficult to break through the new formation of Droṇa. Arjuna had instructed his son, Abhimanyu, to break through, but he was yet to be instructed in the art of coming out. Yudhishtira asked Abhimanyu to break away the web of the enemy forces and open a passage for the Pāṇḍava forces to penetrate through. He was confident that once the formation was broken through, other Pāṇḍava warriors could

follow close on the heels of Abhimanyu and smash the Kaurava forces.

The day proved to be the day of Abhimanyu's triumph and also the day of his death. He asked his charioteer to break through the web with all the fury at his command. Even Drona praised him: "Here is the son of Arjuna." Abhimanyu had outwitted the old Āchārya and his chariot penetrated through the formation like a streak of lightning.

This, however, enraged Duryodhana, who began to accuse Drona of indifference and insincerity. Karṇa, Duhshāsana, Shalya and others combined to attack Abhimanyu.

The Pāṇḍava warriors, who had planned to follow Abhimanyu through the breach in the formation, failed and were checked by Jaya dratha, who swooped down upon the Pāṇḍava forces and closed the breach. The sixteen-year old warrior, Abhimanyu, was thus isolated and surrounded by a number of veteran Kaurava warriors. Duryodhana and six others, Drona himself, Kṛipacharya, Karṇa, Ashwatthāmā, Brihatbala and Kritivarman, jointly pounced upon him. His charioteer was slain and his chariot shattered. The string of his bow was cut.



13. Abhimanyu, warrior-son of Arjuna, penetrated through the Chakravyuha of Dronāchārya but was surrounded and killed by a host of Kaurava warriors.

Thus disabled, he fought with his sword and shield. Then his sword was broken and shield was torn into bits. Abhimanyu took up one of the chariot wheels and hurled it at the enemies.

Lakshamana, son of Duhshāsana, closed with him in a mortal combat. Both fell down but Duhshāsana's son was the first to get up. He struck Abhimanyu with his mace and Abhimanyu fell dead. Yuyutsu, one of the sons of the Dhritarāshtra, who was fighting on the side of the Pāndavas, angrily cried out: "This is ignoble; it is a wicked deed."

Yudhishtira and all others were plunged into great grief. In the evening when Arjuna returned, he broke down in deep lamentation. Yudhishtira felt very guilty because it was he who had persuaded Abhimanyu to break through the Kaurava formation, hoping, of course, that a number of Pāndava warriors should be able to follow him inside the web to give the young warrior help and protection. Fate willed otherwise. Kṛishṇa tried to comfort the bereaved father by saying: "Warriors must ever be ready to die before their time. Stop grieving and infuse courage and fortitude among the demoralised forces."

When Arjuna learnt that Jayadratha had been responsible for closing the breach in the Kaurava formation and thus preventing other Pāṇḍava warriors from following Abhimanyu, he held him responsible for the death of his son and took a vow: "May I never reach heavens if I do not slay Jayadratha before the sunset tomorrow." A spy carried the news to the Kaurava camp. Jayadratha was so unnerved by the news that he decided to leave for his country immediately. It was only when Duryodhana assured him full protection that he agreed to stay on.

d. The Fourth Day:
(No Cease-fire in the Evening)

Next day Jayadratha was into the rear of the main army and a number of warriors, Karṇa, Shalya, Kṛipacharya and others, stood by him. Arjuna was impatient throughout the day to get at Jayadratha. Duhshāsana and many others confronted Arjuna with an intention to check him from reaching close to Jayadratha. The day wore on and the evening drew near. Quite late in the day did Arjuna behold Jayadratha, who was well guarded by a number of Kaurava warriors. Kṛishṇa caused a dark cloud to cover the sun



14. Karna, out of desperation, flung the celestial arrow, gift of Indra, on Ghatotkacha and killed him. Thus Arjuna was saved. The arrow returned to Indra.

and all believed that night had fallen and that Arjuna had failed to fulfil his vow. Duryodhana was exceedingly happy, because Arjuna would thus feel quite disgraced. But when the sun was again visible, Arjuna swooped down upon his prey and cut off his head. Once more, Duryodhana accused Droṇa: "How could the Pāṇḍava warriors succeed in reaching Jayadratha?"

That evening although the night fell, fighting did not stop. The usual rule of cease-fire was not observed. All seemed mad for more blood.

As the bright moon rose in the sky, bitter fighting was renewed. The most terrific combat was between Karṇa and Ghatotkacha. Each smote the other with powerful weapons. Ghatotkacha created illusions but finally Karṇa, out of sheer desperation, flung a celestial arrow, the gift of Indra, which could be used by him only once. It penetrated through Ghatotkacha who fell dead. The Kauravas shouted with glee and the Pāṇḍavas lamented. Karṇa had kept reserved this special weapon for exclusive use against Arjuna in his final encounter, but Ghatotkacha's murderous assault so perplexed everyone in the Kaurava

camp that Karna had no other alternative left but to hurl it at the young giant. The weapon returned to Indra and Arjuna was thus saved, but at a great cost. Bhīma lost his beloved son.

The fighting did not stop still. Drona continued his relentless attacks. Before the night ended, he slew his age-old enemy, Drupada, and the king of Virāta.

Dhrishtadyumna, son of Drupada, sought out Drona to take revenge for his father's slaying. Bhīma advised him to have patience for he was too young to strike down such a veteran warrior. He offered to fight on against him till he was wearied and then Dhrishtadyumna could have his revenge. Both struggled on for hours but none succeeded in tiring out the old Āchārya.

e. The Fifth Day: (Fall of Drona) (Ashwatthāmā—the Elephant?)

Kṛishṇa said to Arjuna, "None can defeat Drona unless dharma is discarded. If only he hears that Ashwatthāmā is killed, he will throw away his weapons in grief and then someone can easily kill him." Arjuna and Yudhishtira shrank in horror at this suggestion. Meanwhile an elephant, named Ashwatthāmā was killed and the Pāndava princes



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15. Drona lost all attachment to life and threw away his weapons, when Yudhishtira said, "Yes, Ashwatthāma is killed," followed in a low tone by the words, 'Ashwatthāma the elephant'. Vengeful Dhrishtadyumna cut off Dronachārya's head.

cried out that 'Ashwatthāmā was killed'. At this moment, Drona had charged a brahmastra to hurl it at the Pāṇdavas. When he heard these words uttered by Bhīma, he shook in grief and sought to confirm the bitter news from Yudhishtira who, he knew well, would never utter an untruth. Yudhishtira trembled in horror but he said to himself, "Let it be my sin." Loudly he said within hearing of Drona, "Yes, Ashwatthāmā has been killed," followed in a low tone by the words, "Ashwatthāmā, the man or the elephant I know not!" Drona lost all attachment to life and threw away his weapons and fainted. Vengeful Dhṛishtadyumna rushed forward and cut off his head.

Ashwatthāmā took the vow to slay Dhṛishtadyumna and all his kinsmen.

The poet tells us that so far Yudhishtira's chariot had always moved four inches above ground and had never touched it but thereafter Yudhishtira too became one of the earth and his chariot came down to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

KARNA PARVA

(KARNA AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER)

KARNA—THE NEXT KAURAVA COMMANDER:

Karna was next chosen as the Supreme Commander of the Kaurava forces. Duryodhana hailed him with joy and great expectations: "You alone can win victory for the Kauravas." Karna was fond of Duryodhana; he was a capable, efficient and skilled warrior. He was happy to get an opportunity to repay the debt of affection and gratitude which he owed to Duryodhana.

a. The First Day:

This was the sixteenth day of the battle of Kurukshetra. Battle raged on for the whole day but nothing remarkable happened.

Yudhishthira had an interesting combat with Duryodhana, in which he killed all the four horses of Duryodhana's chariot and the charioteer as well. Then he tore away his standard and broke his bow. The sword from his hand was tossed away. Other Kaurava warriors surrounded Duryodhana to give

him some relief. Later in the day again the combat started. Yudhishtira threw a javelin at Duryodhana who fainted. Kṛitivarman took away Duryodhana from the battle-field. On that day Karna had a duel with Nakula. Nakula lost his chariot, charioteer and bow and became helpless. Karna could have easily killed Nakula but he only smiled and let him go. Duryodhana wondered why Karna had not killed Nakula when he could have easily done so.

Duryodhana was greatly disappointed because Karna lost the whole first day of his command and failed to kill Arjuna, but he did not say a word to him. He had full faith in Karna, who said: "Arjuna and I will fight tomorrow. Either I win by killing him or I lose my life."

b. The Second Day :

Karna was keen to have a charioteer like that of Arjuna. Duryodhana took courage to request Shalya if he could agree to be Karna's charioteer. At first Shalya was wild with rage, but later he agreed.

On the fateful day, the seventeenth of the battle of Kurukshetra, two chariots proceeded towards each other. One was carrying Karna and was driven by Shalya, a veteran warrior, while the

other was driven by Kṛishṇa and carried Arjuna. It was to be no ordinary fight. It was to be a fight between two real brothers. Karna knew it but Arjuna was unaware of this fact. It was going to be the greatest combat of the entire battle of Kurukshetra.

In the meantime, something very ghastly took place. Duhshāsana and Bhīma faced each other. Duhshāsana sent a shower of arrows at Bhīma. As Bhīma thought of what Duhshāsana had done to humiliate Draupadī, the anger within him swelled. Said Bhīma, "I have a debt I owed you for all these fourteen years. I have not forgotten. Eighteen days back also you sent a message through Ulūka, son of Shakuni. I will fulfil my oath today."

Throwing away all weapons, Bhīma jumped from his chariot and leapt upon Duhshāsana like a tiger. It was a terrible fight, indeed. Bhīma caught hold of Duhshāsana and threw him on the ground. He put his foot upon his neck and tore off his right hand. Thus the oath of Draupadī was fulfilled, as it was that hand with which Duhshāsana had dared touch her hair. Next, to fulfil his own oath, Bhīma ripped open Duhshāsana's chest with a swift stroke of his sword, and he drank warm blood which spurted out. Like a

beast of prey, Bhīma danced around, mad with the spirit of revenge and roared aloud, "I have achieved it. The oath I took against this sinner has been redeemed."

The gruesome sight made everyone tremble with fear. Duryodhana stood quivering on seeing the wretched end of his dear brother.

Even Karṇa was shaken. Shalya, who watched signs of depression on the face of Karṇa, said to him, "O Karṇa, do not flinch from duty. Advance towards Arjuna. Win or depart to the regions where the brave go after being slain on the battle-field."

At this ominous moment, Ashwatthāmā also advised Duryodhana to end the gruesome war and make peace with the Pāṇdavas. Duryodhana, however, was more determined to carry on. Said Duryodhana, "Did you not see Bhīma dancing over my brother's mangled body? How can I now talk of peace at this stage? I must take revenge for my beloved brother's death."

Then followed the deadly combat between Arjuna and Karṇa. Karṇa shot an arrow which spat fire and made for Arjuna like a flaming double-tongued serpent. Kṛishṇa pressed the chariot down and it went five fingers deep into the mud. The arrow carried away Arjuna's crown but his

head was saved. Arjuna's face was red with shame and anger.

At one stage, Arjuna's celestial bow was struck and the bow string severed. Arjuna said, "Pause, O Karna, you cannot attack a disabled foe." But Karna heeded not and Arjuna was wounded.

Some time later, a wheel of Karna's chariot sank in the soft ground and he cried out, "Pause, O Arjuna, it is unmanly to attack a helpless enemy." Arjuna paused, but Krishna intervened: "O Karna, now you remember that there is something like fair-play. How far was it manly and moral when Draupadi was humiliated in the assembly hall before the elders? Did you not mock at her then? How far was it manly and chivalrous when you and six other warriors surrounded young Abhimanyu and slew him? How can you now talk of chivalry and fair-play?" Krishna urged Arjuna to be quick. The wheel of Karna's chariot would not budge, though he strove with all his strength.

Then Karna tried to recall the mantra which he had learnt from Parashurama to discharge deadly Brahmastra on Arjuna. We are told that Karna had, at one stage, become Parashurama's disciple by posing that he was a brahmana and learnt from him the mantra for using the Brahmastra.



• चित्र - चमन, देहरादून

16. A wheel of Karna's chariot sank in the soft ground and he cried out: "O, Arjuna, it is unmanly to attack a helpless enemy." Krishna urged Arjuna to be quick and not to miss the opportunity.

However, one day when Parashurāma was reclining with his head on Karṇa's lap, a worm burrowed into Karṇa's thigh. Karṇa bore the pain quietly because he did not want his teacher to wake up. Later, when Parashurāma saw blood oozing out of the wound on Karṇa's thigh, he became suspicious and said, "Dear pupil, you are not a brāhmaṇ but a kshatriya, because kshatriyas alone can bear bodily torment." Karṇa confessed the guilt. Parashurāma gave him the curse : "At the hour of need you will fail to recall the mantra for the use of the Brahmastra." That curse inflicted by Parashurāma worked at this crucial hour and Karṇa's memory failed him.

Arjuna wavered but Kṛishṇa commanded him to waste no more time. Arjuna sent an arrow which severed the head of Karna. Thus, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, a brother killed a brother.

Chapter IX

SHALYA PARVA

(SHALYA AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER)

A. SHALYA AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER:

On the eighteenth day of the battle of Kurukshetra, Kripāchārya went to see Duryodhana early in the morning and said, "The kshatriya code of honour is the destructive code. Bhīshma, Droṇa, Karṇa and so many other warriors have gone. Most of your brothers have been killed. Your son, Lakshmana, has been killed. You have seen how brutally Duhshāsana was killed yesterday by Bhīma. It is my desire to see you living. Krishna is for peace and so is Yudhishtira. Let us sue for peace."

Duryodhana replied: "We have done so much to harm and humiliate the Pāndavas. Peace is now not possible. Moreover I do not want to make up with the Pāndavas. I am set on war. All my dear friends have gone. They are waiting for me. I am not afraid of death. I am guilty of many things but not ingratitude. I am prepared to die a brave death on the battle-field."

Shalya became the Supreme Commander of the Kaurava forces on the last day. He was a capable warrior and was extremely good at organising formations.

Shalya became engaged in a duel with Yudhishthira. Bhīma also arrived to the help of Yudhishthira. He felled the horses of Shalya's chariot and forced him to get down from the chariot. Soon it became a duel between Bhīma and Shalya. Shalya fainted and was carried away from the field by Kṛipā. On his return, Shalya started killing ruthlessly. It again became a duel between Yudhishthira and Shalya, the former determined to kill the latter. Finally Yudhishthira threw a javelin which penetrated deep into the chest of Shalya and he fell dead.

In the meantime, Sahadeva killed Shakuni and Nakula killed Shakuni's son, Ulūka. Bhīma cut down the surviving brothers of Duryodhana. Only four persons were left in the Kaurava camp—Duryodhana, Ashwatthāmā, Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman.

B. FALL OF DURYODHANA:

Duryodhana fled away from the battle-field with his mace. He plunged himself into a lake and lay concealed there.

Bhīma went out in search of Duryodhana and, on discovering the place of his concealment, he challenged him to come out and fight. Duryodhana spoke with dignity: "I have not come here to save my life. I have stepped into water to cool the fire that is raging within me. My desire for kingdom is gone and this world is yours without a rival. Enjoy the undisputed sovereignty."

Replied Yudhishtira: "All the wrongs committed by you and the outrage that you committed on Draupadī can be wiped off only with your life."

Duryodhana came out of the lake and offered to fight all the Pāndavas, one by one, as he was single and without an armour.

Yudhishtira said: "O Duryodhana, tell us how Abhimanyu was killed. When people face misfortune, they talk of dharma and chivalry. Wear your armour and choose any one of us you like and fight." Duryodhana chose Bhīma.

Duryodhana and Bhīma fought like two bulls. Both were great in wielding maces. Once Duryodhana hit Bhīma hard on his head. Bhīma staggered but recovered. But then Bhīma leapt like a lion and hit Duryodhana hard on his thigh. It was a foul blow but Kṛishṇa had given him a hint by touching his thigh. Duryodhana lay prostrate. The vow taken by Bhīma was fulfilled. He danced



चित्र-यमन, दे. दे.

17. Bhima hit upon the thigh of Duryodhana. Bhima cried out: "Draupadi is avenged."

about and kicked Duryodhana's head, crying: "Draupadī is avenged!" Yudhishtira asked Bhīma to stop misbehaving, saying. "Duryodhana is a prince and our kinsman."

Dying Duryodhana turned towards Kṛishṇa and said scornfully: "You have managed the slaying of the veterans by base means. You could not have brought about the end of Bhīshma, Droṇa and Karna without foul means."

Kṛishṇa replied: "Greed and pride led you to commit wicked deeds and you have reaped bitter fruits."

Duryodhana said with pride: "I am dying the death of a prince. I lie helpless on the ground with legs broken. How do I care if Bhīma put his foot over my head? In a few minutes vultures and crows will settle over my dead body."

Meanwhile Balarāma arrived. He had seen how Bhīma had aimed a deadly blow which broke the thigh of Duryodhana. As it was against the rules of combat, he flared up. He said to Bhīma: "Shame on you; no kshatriya will hit below the navel." Then he turned towards his brother and said: "How have you looked on and tolerated such things?"

Kṛishṇa pacified Balarāma by pointing out, “Did not Bhīma take the vow to break the knees of Duryodhana?”

Balarāma tried to attack Bhīma but Kṛishṇa reminded him that he had taken a vow not to fight against the Pāṇḍavas.

Chapter X-

SAUPTIKĀ PARVA (THE MID-NIGHT ATTACK)

A. THE MID-NIGHT ATTACK ON THE PĀNDAVAS' CAMP:

Leaving Duryodhana writhing in agony, the three surviving Kaurava warriors, Ashwatthāmā, Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman, retired to the forest close by to rest during night. They lay under a banyan tree and Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman, exhausted with the day's fight and mental anguish, fell fast asleep immediately. Ashwatthāmā found it difficult to get sleep. He had no peace of mind and was determined to avenge the death of his father and, more than that, the killing of Duryodhana by Bhīma.

While lying awake, Ashwatthāmā watched the owls, the nocturnal birds of prey, coming quietly and tearing the sleeping crows to shreds. The owls seemed happy after committing such a heinous crime—a large-scale massacre of helpless crows at mid-night. This gave a brilliant idea to Ashwatthāmā, who decided to wreak vengeance

on the Pāṇdavas in a like manner, by a mid-night attack on their camp, where they were having the first night of peaceful sleep. He grew so excited that he woke up the other two and gave them his plans.

Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman were horrified to hear the evil plans of Ashwatthāmā. They tried their best to desist him from committing such a great sin. "It is praiseworthy that you have sworn to avenge the death of your father and Duryodhana, but a night attack would be a great sin. You will earn infamy." Tomorrow, early in the morning, all the three of us will challenge the Pāṇdavas and either kill them or die." Ashwatthāmā refused to listen to their advice. Said he, "If you do not support me, I will go alone and do the needful." Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman ultimately decided to go along with him and be his partners in the ghastly mid-night attack. Whether it was moral or immoral mattered to them no more.

The three of them reached the camp of the Pāṇdavas. While Kṛipāchārya and Kṛitivarman kept watch at the gate and promised to cut down all those who tried to escape, Ashwatthāmā, armed with a sword which was the gift of Shāṅkar, entered the camp stealthily. First he entered the



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18. Ashwatthāma entered the Pandava camp at midnight and massacred all the remaining Pāṇḍava warriors.

camp of Dhṛishtadyumna, who was plunged in deep slumber and cruelly butchered him. Next, he killed all the Pāṇchālas and all the sons of Draupadī one by one during their sleep. Shrieks and moans arose from all sides. At the end, they set fire to the camp. The whole place looked like a cremation ground.

Drunk with the joy at having taken revenge from the Pāṇdavas, the three Kaurava warriors hurried to the spot where Duryodhana lay dying. He was unconscious with his wounds bleeding and dogs and jackals waiting for him to die. Ashwatthāmā said to Duryodhana: "We have done our duty. In a night attack we have slaughtered all the Pāṇchālas, the sons of Draupadī and the rest of the survivors of the Pāṇdava army. There are only seven survivors on the Pāṇdava side and three on our side." Duryodhana exclaimed: "Ashwatthāmā, you have achieved what veterans like Bhīshma and Droṇa failed to achieve. You have pleased me and I die in peace."

The three warriors fled away thereafter, fearing the wrath of the Pāṇdavas, who had survived because, on the advice of Kṛishṇa, they had slept in the camp of the Kauravas that night.

B. DRAUPADĪ'S LAMENTATION:

Next morning, when Yudhishthira came to know of the ghastly night slaughter, he broke down. It was the greatest calamity that had befallen the Pāndavas. Draupadi mourned bitterly the death of her brother and her sons. She asked Yudhishthira, "Is there no one who can avenge the slaughter of my sons and slay Ashwatthāmā?" Yudhishthira tried to pacify Draupadī by saying, "Let us not commit another sin by killing a brāhmaṇa". Moreover, it was known to all that Ashwatthāmā had been granted eternal life. Then Draupadī asked Bhīma to go and get the jewel that Ashwatthāmā wore in his head ornaments.

The Pāndavas immediately went in search of Ashwatthāmā who was hiding in the āshram of Vyāsa.

When Ashwatthāmā saw Bhīma coming towards him, followed by Arjuna and Kṛishṇa, in his anger he sent the Brahmastra towards them for their destruction. Arjuna replied by sending the Pāshupatastra. The two could have brought about the total destruction of the entire world.

The poet tells us how Nārada and Vyāsa intervened and stood in between the two flaming arrows and asked both Arjuna and Ashwatthāmā to recall their arrows. Arjuna could recall his but

Ashwatthāmā failed to do so. He directed it towards the womb of the woman in the Pāndava family; this was Uttarā who was bearing the child of Abhimanyu.

This abominable action of Ashwatthāmā to make the world Pāndava-less that way very much enraged Kṛishṇa, who said to him, “No action could have been more heinous and contemptible than this. But I will give life to this child. You will see this child rule over the kingdom of Hastināpur for sixty years.” When Uttarā gave birth to the child, it was a dead child, but with the blessings of Kṛishṇa it was restored to life. This was Parikshita, the grandson of Arjuna and the son of Abhimanyu, who succeeded Yudhishthira on the throne of Hastināpur.

The two sages, Nārada and Vyāsa, were also very angry with Ashwatthāmā. They asked him to remove the jewel from his head and hand it over to the Pāndavas as a compensation. Ashwatthāmā was very unhappy to part with the jewel but he had to do so; there was no alternative.

Bhīma handed over the jewel to Draupadī who handed it over to Yudhishthira. It was worn by him in his crown.

CHAPTER XI

STRI PARVA

(LAMENTATIONS OF WOMEN)

A. HASTINĀPUR IN MOURNING:

When the battle of Kūrukshetra was over, Yudhishtira, along with his brothers, Draupadī, Kṛishṇa and others, set out for Hastināpur. Yudhishtira was now going to be crowned as the king of Hastināpur, but he was not happy. It was not a 'victory' procession but a 'mourning' procession. Hastināpur was virtually a city of mourners. Mothers moaned for their sons; wives for their husbands; and children cried aloud beside them. Everywhere, lamentations greeted the Pāndava brothers.

Dhṛitrāshtra, accompanied by hundreds of bereaved women, proceeded to the battle-field of Kurukshetra—the scene of terrible destruction. The air was filled with the loud wailing of women. Dhṛitrāshtra could only weep aloud. Said Sanjaya to Dhṛitarāshtra, "O king, weeping aloud will not lessen your grief, nor will words of consolation give any solace to those who have lost their

nearest and dearest in this battle. It is not the time to lament. It is now time to arrange for proper funeral ceremonies for the dead.”

Vidura tried to assuage the king’s grief:” It is not right to grieve for those who have died on the battlefield. Relationship ends with death. From the nowhere do lives come and with death they disappear into the nowhere.”

Vyāsa also spoke to Dhṛitrāshtra tenderly: “My son, your sons have now no connection with you. Look upon Yudhishtira as your son. This is the only way you can lessen your grief.”

B. THE PĀNDAVAS MET DHṚITRĀSHTRA :

Yudhishtira went straight to Dhṛitrashttra and bowed before him. Dhṛitrāshtra embraced him, though there was no love and affection in the embrace. Then Dhṛitrāshtra asked for Bhīma. Very wisely Kṛishṇa hurried to the gymnasium and brought the iron image of Bhīma which Duryodhana had used everyday for his combat practice against that greatest enemy of his on earth. Dhṛitrāshtra embraced the iron image and his arms tightened—tighter and tighter—till the image was crushed. Bhīma was horrified to witness the scene. Then Dhṛitrāshtra fell back fainting and wailed: “Alas! Bhīma was like a son to me. I have

killed him in anger.” When Kṛishṇa realised that anger of Dhṛitarāshtra was abated, he asked Bhīma to approach his uncle who embraced him with warmth. Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva—, embraced the old king, their uncle.

C. ‘IF YOU HAD LEFT ONLY ONE OUT OF THE HUNDRED’:

It was a terrible ordeal when the Pāndavas approached Queen Gāndhārī. There was no end to her sorrow and wailing. Vyasa tried to pacify her, by saying, “Gāndhārī, my daughter, try to be forgiving. You had always condemned actions of Duryodhana and said, ‘Where there is Dharma, there will victory be.’ So you know that his cause was not righteous. Why then do you condemn the Pāndavas now?” Gāndhārī replied: “I am not angry. If only the Pāndavas had left alive one out of the hundred, I would have been satisfied. I am angry because Bhīma killed Duryodhana in an unfair fight. I am angry with Bhīma because he drank blood of Duhshāsana.”

Bhīma apologised but explained his position, saying, “I had to break the thigh of Duryodhana because I had taken an oath to do so. I drank blood of Duhshāsana because when he had humiliated Draupadī I had taken an oath to that effect. Mother,



विष्णु चमने, इ. इ.

19. Yudhishtira prostrated before Gāndhārī to touch her feet and apologised. His toes were charred black. Gāndhārī said: "If only they had left one out of the hundred."

if at that very time I had killed Duhshāsana in the assembly hall, I am sure you would have pardoned me.”

Gāndhārī then turned her attention to Yudhishtira. With folded hands he approached her and said, “ I am the killer of your sons and I deserve your curses.” When Yudhishtira bent down to touch her feet and seek her curse, through the little space under the folded cloth tied over her eyes, she chanced to look at the toe of prostrating Yudhishtira and it was charred black. Bhīma was frightened and hid himself behind Kṛishṇa.

Gāndhārī did not spare Kṛishṇa either: “This war could have been averted if you had so desired. If you had been impartial you could have prevented this total annihilation. Remember thirty-six years after, your family, the entire Vṛishṇi clan, will also be destroyed by mutual killing, cousins killing cousins, as cousins have caused destruction of cousins on the battle-field of Kurukshetra.”

Kṛishṇa replied: “Mother, you have really thus blessed us, otherwise the Vṛishṇis are indestructible. They can be only destroyed by mutual killing. Rouse up your sense of Dharma. Your husband and you were solely responsible for spoiling Duryodhana and bringing about the

destruction of the entire clan.”

Gāndhārī heaved a deep sigh and stood silent.

D. THE UNFORTUNATE PĀNDAVA WOMEN:

Lamentations were limited not merely to the Kaurava women. Losses had been great on the side of the Pāndavas as well. Draupadī had been the most unfortunate. She embraced Kuntī after fourteen years and cried out: “Mother, all your grandsons are killed. All my sons and Abhimanyu have been killed.”

Gāndhārī spoke to Draupadī: “Dear daughter, do not grieve. Look at me and comfort yourself. Who can give solace to you and me? It is the working of fate. Vidura, Vyāsa and Bhīshma—all had given us the warning that destruction of the entire Kuru clan was inevitable.”

Above all, Kuntī’s grief was most unbearable. When Yúdhishthira had finished giving offerings to the sons of Draupadī and Arjuna had made the offerings for Abhimanyu, Kuntī approached Yudhishthira to make offerings for ‘one more’. With a broken heart, she cried out: “This is my first-born, Karṇa, your eldest brother, killed by his own brother.” This was the greatest tragedy for the Pāndava brothers. Kṛishṇa knew that Karṇa was the son of Kuntī and Karṇa knew that he was the

eldest of the Pāṇdavas. For the world, and for the five Pāṇdavas, he was just a chārīoteer's son—sūtaputra. For Arjuna, he was the bitterest foe. Nothing could be more tragic than this—brother had killed brother.

E. BACK TO HASTINĀPUR:

The Pāṇdava brothers and others had stayed away from Hastināpur for almost a month. Yudhishtira was stricken with intense remorse. Everyday he would think of retiring to the forest and doing penance to expiate his sins. So much of bloodshed—all the kinsmen killed—a very heavy price paid indeed for getting the throne.

Yudhishtira said to his brothers: "I find no joy and happiness in getting the throne. Permit me to take up sanyāsa."

The other four brothers laid emphasis on his duties as a king. Bhīma was particularly critical of Yudhishtira's philosophy of life. Said he, "Sanyāsa is not the dharma of the Kshatriyas. We have to live an active life and accept the responsibility of ruling the land."

Vyāsa, Nārada and other sages came and advised Yudhishtira on his duties as a king: "A king has no right to his personal grief."

Draupadī justified the killing of Duryodhana and his men. Said she, "As a kshatriya it is your duty to inflict punishment on the evil-doers. Why should we regret for what we have done? It is now your responsibility to govern the land according to the principles of justice."

Gradually, Yudhishtira gained peace of mind. He became mentally prepared to take over the responsibility for ruling the people.

All people returned to Hastinapur. Old king Dhṛitrāshtra's chariot led the procession. Yudhishtira's chariot was drawn by sixteen white bullocks. Bhīma held the reins and Arjuna held the white umbrella over his head. Nakula and Sahadeva moved the *chanwars* (royal whiskers on either side). Kṛishṇa followed in another chariot. Women of the royal household were carried in palanquins.

On arrival at Hastināpur, Yudhishtira was annointed as the king. Holy waters were sprinkled over him and Draupadī; the brāhmaṇas chanted mantras from the religious scriptures.

Bhīma was appointed as the heir-apparent and Vidura as the minister-counsellor.

CHAPTER XII

SHĀNTI PARVA

(DISCOURSES OF BHĪSHMA)

A. THE PĀNDAVAS SOUGHT BHĪSHMA'S ADVICE:

The final funeral rites for the departed heroes had been performed at Kurukshetra. On return to Hastināpur, Yudhishtira had been duly crowned king and had taken up the duties of the state. Still he continued to remain unhappy. He approached Kṛishṇa and said, "With your help we have got back our kingdom. You have been our guide; you have always shown us the path of righteousness. We are so grateful to you. But this victory appears to me to be only a great defeat."

Kṛishṇa remained thoughtful for some time and then said, "I will take you to your Grandsire, Bhīshma, who is living the last few days of his life on this earth on the battle-field. He has always followed the path of righteousness and he is the repository of all knowledge and all wisdom on earth."

Kṛishṇā, along with all the Pāṇḍava brothers and others, arrived on the battlefield, where the great Kuru warrior lay on his bed of arrows. Kṛishṇā addressed him thus: "Here is Yudhishtira in front of you. He is grieved because he thinks that he is the cause of the death of his cousins. It is for you to make him shake off this sorrow, so that he rules the kingdom with responsibility and devotion. You are the only person who can guide him."

Bhīshma was weak because of his wounds; his pain was unbearable; and his memory was clouded. But with Kṛishṇā's blessings, he looked fresh and glorious. He spoke tenderly to Yudhishtira and said, "You are a kshatriya and it is the duty of every kshatriya to fight and kill for the cause of righteousness. You had to kill your kinsmen, but you should not grieve for having done your duty."

Kṛishṇā entreated Bhīshma to give instructions to Yudhishtira on all aspects of life and thus calm his uneasy mind. Bhīshma then told Yudhishtira to ask him questions so that his doubts regarding dharma and truth were cleared. Bhīshma gave his discourses through the catechetical method (questions and answers)

Out of a total of about 2000 chapters in the Mahābhārata, Shānti Parva and Anushāsana Parva have more than 450 chapters, more than one-fifth of the total number. The Mahābhārata is, thus, not merely a story of a family feud among the cousins; it is a store-house of countless maxims and truths of dharma.

Discourses given in the Shānti Parva are divided under three heads: Rāja Dharma, Āpad Dharma and Moksha Dharma.

B. RĀJA DHARMA (SOVEREIGN STATE CRAFT; CONDUCT OF SOVEREIGN KING):

a. Yudhishtira asked Bhīshma about the duties of a king:

Bhīshma said, "It is very essential that a country should have a king because kingship confers many benefits upon the people. The king is God in human form. He destroys sinners like Agni Deva, does good to people with the help of spies like Sun God, puts down people of bad conduct like God of Death, protects those who follow Dharma and punishes those who follow Adharma like God Yama and, lastly, gives wealth and riches to the people like God Kubera."

b. Regarding the duties of a king, Bhīshma laid stress on the following:

- i. A king is essentially a man of action. It is a fallacy to say that destiny rules a king. While destiny is powerful, action is equally powerful. Action is more potent of the two.
- ii. Justice should be the second nature of a king. His conduct should be straight-forward.
- iii. The first duty of a king is towards his subjects. He should guard them as a mother guards a child in her womb.
- iv. A righteous king should always act in a manner as to sacrifice what he longs most for the sake of securing welfare of his subjects.
- v. A king should never be too mild for he will then be disregarded. He should also not be too harsh and fierce because then his subjects will be afraid of him.

c. Yudhishtira then asked Bhīshma : “What should be the characteristics of ministers, courtiers and counsellors of a king?” Bhīshma laid stress on the following:

- i. The legislators should be men who are modest, self-restrained, truthful and sincere

They should have courage to speak what is proper.

- ii. The king should select his ministers from all classes of society to have a well-balanced team. There should also be an inner cabinet.
- d. When Yudhishtira asked Bhīshma about the policy of taxation, Bhīshma pointed out: "A man who wishes to have milk cannot have milk by cutting off the udders of the cow. A man who gives the cow grass and water and treats it kindly will have abundant quantities of milk." According to him:
 - i. A king is a trustee for the royal treasury and he should not spend government funds wrecklessly for his own advantages.
 - ii. Taxes should be collected at the right time through the right means and used for the right cause.

C. ĀPAD DHARMA (CONDUCT DURING THE PERIOD OF ADVERSITY) :

Yudhishtira asked Bhīshma how a king should behave when he is in distress. Bhīshma said, among other things,

- i. A king should fear his kinsmen as he would fear death. At the same time a king without kinsmen is unfortunate. He should distrust them at heart but behave as though he trusts them completely.
- ii. Friends appear as foes and foes appear as friends. Friends should be tested before accepting them as friends. Foes should be well-studied and their weaknesses and strengths understood and assessed.
- iii. An intelligent king should know when to make peace with a foe. When the time demands you make peace with your foe, but at the earliest opportunity you must be ready to wage war.
- iv. When a king is defeated, he should submit for the time being, win confidence of the enemy through good behaviour, win over allies through gifts and secret manoeuvrings, make one enemy fight against another, encourage your enemy to indulge in luxuries, etc. This is statecraft.
- v. If there is a remnant of a debt, or of a fire, or of a foe, it will grow again. A thorn that is not removed completely will give trouble again.

D. MOKSHA DHARMA (ATTAINMENT OF FINAL SALVATION) :

a. Yudhishtira sought answer to one question: “What helps a person to achieve salvation?”

In mentioning the means for attaining Moksha (Salvation), Bhīshma enumerated certain important means:

- i. The wise person should free himself from anger through patience, destroy desire through abandonment of thought, protect Prāna by concentration on Ātman and eradicate hatred through discipline. He should conquer the tongue and the mind by his intellect, the intellect by his knowledge, and knowledge by Ātman. He should eschew lust, anger, greed, fear and sleep and then practise concentration.
- ii. A person who aspires to gain emancipation is beyond the world of the five senses. Pleasure or pain, loss or gain, victory or defeat, are the same to him. There is no gain equal to knowledge, no misery equal to desire and no happiness equal to detachment.
Bhīshma also talked of Karma, Jnāna and Bhakti. One should perform good acts and

if he acts without desire for fruits, there is no bondage for him.

- iii. **Brahmajnāna** is the highest knowledge; it is eternal. It is Māyā which enslaves a person and he finds it difficult to perceive the Parmātman which is within him only. One can gain salvation through all three means—Karma, Bhakti and Jnāna.
- iv. A **Brahmajnāni** (a person who has attained Salvation) has no likes and dislikes, no friends or foes, no love or hatred. He sees all creatures within himself and sees Ātman in all creatures.

b. Bhīshma also talked to Yudhishtira on four classes in society, four stages in a man's life and four values of life for a man. Talking about Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha—doing your duties, gaining wealth, enjoying pleasure and finally gaining release, Bhīshma considered Moksha to be the most important in life.

- c. Bhīshma referred to certain strong enemies of man which caused him endless misery. "A person who is not cautious is caught napping by these enemies, which

are always awake and in search of victims. One of them is anger, which is born of greed and can be subdued by patience. Another is desire born out of thought and can be eliminated by non-attachment. Ignorance induces a person to commit sins and a person can remove his ignorance by the company of learned people. Evil, pride, jealousy, fear are some other enemies of a man. One can subdue them by the company of good people."

- d. Speaking about the parents and the teacher, Bhīshma said:

"The parents and the teacher are the three worlds. One conquers this world by doing service to the father, the upper world by doing service to the mother and the Brahma Loka by doing service to the teacher. A teacher is greater than the parents in one way: the parents create the body, while the teachings of the guru know no old age."

No aspect of life did Bhīshma leave untouched during his discourses, which were highly lucid, enlightening and thought-provoking.

CHAPTER XIII

ANUSHĀSANA PARVA

(PREACHING OF SELF-COTROL)

SELECTED MAXIMS FROM BHĪSHMA'S DISCOURSES:

Bhīshma's discourses on Dharma continue in the Anushāsana Parva as well.

Some selected maxims are :

- (1) Time passes and the man who grows older finds his hair, teeth and eyes grow older. One thing alone never grows old—thirst for riches and love of gold.
- (2) This is the sum of all righteousness: Treat others as you would like yourself to be treated.
- (3) Before decay weakens your strength and mars the beauty of your body and the Ender breaks up your fragile body, lay up the only treasure: Do good deeds and amass that wealth.
- (4) There never was, never is and never will be a person who has no desires.

- (5) Heaven's gate is very narrow and minute. Foolish people, blinded by attractions of the world, fail to see it. Its portals are closed with bolts of pride, passion, avarice and lust.

When asked by Yudhishtira, "Who is the true friend of man?" Bhīshma said, "Man is born alone and dies alone. He has no other companion in his journey. Only dharma follows him."

When the discourses were over and the holy day arrived—the day on which Bhīshma was to gain freedom from earthly bondage, Dhritrāshtra, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Pāndava brothers, Vidura, Kṛishṇa and others—all arrived. The sun by then had turned his chariot towards the north. Bhīshma's face was lit up with an unearthly smile and he willed to die. The arrows left his body, wounds disappeared and his spirit, bright as a meteor, ascended to the skies. His kinsmen covered him with garlands and perfumes and performed his last funeral ceremonies at the bank of the Gangā.

The poet tells us that when the kinsmen offered the oblations to Gangā, the river stopped flowing and Gangā (Shāntanu's wife) appeared, lamenting for Devavrata. When Kṛishṇa said to her, "Rejoice, for he is free from earthly bondage," Gangā disappeared. The river began to flow freely again.

CHAPTER XIV

ASHWAMEDHIKĀ PARVA

(HORSE SACRIFICE)

ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA—A GREAT RULER'S PRIVILEGE :

Although Yudhishtira had accepted his responsibilities as a kshatriya ruler and agreed to be crowned, he had not yet been able to get over his grief. Often he would think of abandoning everything and retiring to the forest. Vyāsa was a frequent visitor to his court. Advice given by him from time to time did help Yudhishtira to throw off the mantle of sorrow gradually.

On one of his visits, Vyāsa suggested that it would be a great achievement if he performed the Ashwamedha. Yudhishtira's brothers welcomed the suggestion with great enthusiasm. Arjuna offered to go round the country leading the sacrificial horse.

As huge expenditure was involved in the performance of the Ashwamedha, on the advice of Vyāsa, the Pāndavas proceeded to the Himālayas

to dig up untold treasures of the Māruts lying buried on the mountain slopes. Kṛishṇa was also invited from Dwārikā to come and help Yudhishtira in the proper performance of the yajna.

a. The Sacrificial Horse:

A search was made for a moon-white horse with a yellow tail and one black ear. When it was found, a gold plate with the name of Yudhishtira was tied on its forehead. Thereafter the horse was let loose and allowed to wander wheresoever it desired. An army led by Arjuna followed the horse.

According to tradition, when the sacred horse entered a particular kingdom, that kingdom had to accept the sovereignty of Yudhishtira. If the ruler of a particular kingdom detained the horse, he was compelled to fight with the army that followed the horse.

Arjuna met with interesting adventures in following the horse. In most of the countries he was not opposed at all. Opposition came primarily from the descendants of certain warriors who had been defeated or were slain in the battle of Kurukshetra. Among these were the sons and grandsons of Trigartadesh, a ruler, Susharmā, Vajradatta, son of Bhagadatta and relations of Jayadratha.

Experience in Manipur was very interesting, indeed. The horse was detained but when the king, named Babhru-Vāhana, found that the horse bore the name of Yudhishtira, he understood that the warrior following him was his father, Arjuna. When Babhru-Vāhana came to pay him his respects, Arjuna spurned him and said: "If I were your father, you would have no fear of me."

Thereupon the young king challenged Arjuna to battle and was victorious. He severed Arjuna's head with an arrow. King's mother, Chitrangadā, and Ulūpi, the daughter of Vāsuki, the king of serpents, both married to Arjuna during the days of his exile, were stricken with sorrow. Ulūpi sent Babhru-Vāhanato the under-world to obtain a magic jewel from her mother. First the king of serpents refused to give that magic jewel. Later Babhru-Vāhana used arrows which turned into peacocks and devoured serpents. Ultimately the king was compelled to hand over the jewel. Thus Arjuna came back to life. Babhru-Vāhana accompanied his father in following the horse. The horse wandered from kingdom to kingdom and reached Hastināpur after a year.

b. Ashwamedha Yajna Rites:

In the meantime Yudhishtira lived a life of

purity and self-restraint. Great was the rejoicing on the return of the horse. A large number of kings came to Hastināpur to honour Yudhishtira and pay him tribute. Dhṛitrāshtra and Yudhishtira sat on golden thrones. Yudhishtira ploughed a field with a golden pough. Draupadī followed him sowing seeds of every kind. Eight pits were dug for the offerings of milk and butter in the sacrificial fire. Priests offered animals in sacrifice to celestial powers. Sixty-four kings and their wives brought water from the holy Gangā and each one poured a quantity over the head of Yudhishtira and what remained, over the head of the sacred horse.

Dhaumya performed religious rites and washed the horse. Then he handed over a scimitar to Bhīma who severed the head of the horse, from which a bright light issued forth. Amidst chanting of mentras the body of the sacrificial horse was divided and offerings made in the sacrificial fire. Vyāsa blessed Yudhishtira and Kṛishṇa embraced him. Gifts were given to the brāhmanas.

All the kings returned to their kingdoms after they had been honoured by Yudhishtira. Kṛishṇa and Balarāma also returned to Dwarikā

CHAPTER XV

ĀSHRAMAVĀSIKA PARVA

(ĀSHRAMA LIFE IN THE FOREST)

A. THE ELDERS RETIRED TO THE ĀSHRAMA LIFE:

For the first fifteen years of Yudhishtira's rule, Dhṛitrāshtra and Gāndhārī stayed with him in the palace at Hastināpur. Yudhishtira was very respectful towards both of them. He had given clear instructions to his four brothers and ministers to pay due respects to them. On all important matters of the state he always consulted the old king. Only Bhīma's attitude was rather unsatisfactory at times, when within their hearing he would utter some unpalatable words.

Dhṛitrāshtra always remained sunk in woe. He knew well that Duryodhana's cause was never righteous. He also felt that he himself was, in a way, responsible for the calamities that befell the Kauravas. His heart burnt within himself because of this guilt. He wore deer-skin, slept on a mat of grass and took food once in four or five days just

to keep the body and soul together. Still he could not be happy to stay with the killers of his sons.

Dhritrāshtra decided to leave Hastināpur and retire to a hermitage in the forest. He summoned Yudhishtira in his presence and told him about his wish. Yudhishtira tried his best to dissuade him but he remained adamant. Vyāsa also advised Yudhishtira to let the old king and Gāndhārī go to the forest and spent the rest of their lives in prayers.

Kuntī also decided to accompany Dhritrāshtra and Gāndhārī to the forest. All efforts by the Pāndava sons, Draupadī, Subhadrā and others to make mother Kuntī change her mind were in vain. Sanjaya and Vidura also decided to spend the rest of their lives in the forest along with the old king.

Most unwillingly, the Pāndava brothers and Draupadī bade farewell to all of them. They retired to an āshrama near Kurukshetra and spent their time in prayers to assuage the grief in their hearts.

B. THE PĀNDAVAS' VISIT TO THE ĀSHRAMA :

After some time the Pāndava brothers and Draupadī paid a visit to the āshrama to meet the

elders. They paid respects to their mother, Dhṛitrāshtra and Gāndhārī. Vidura was not there for he had been undergoing hard penance and waiting for final deliverance. Yudhishtira went to meet Vidura. The four eyes became locked and a strange phenomenon occurred. Yudhishtira felt growing stronger and wiser. Vidura was dead and his spirit passed into the body of Yudhishtira because both were incarnations of the God of Dharma.

The Pāṇḍava brothers spent some time with the elders before returning to Hastināpur.

C. THE GHOST WARRIORS VISITED THOSE WHO LIVED:

On this occasion of the passing away of Vidura all kinsmen assembled. The old-time grief was awakened. Fathers and mothers lamented for their sons and wives for their husbands. Vyāsa asked them to bathe in the river Gangā at sunset and then they waited on the river bank, while Vyāsa chanted mantras. Suddenly the waters of the river heaved and all the heroes who had been slain rose one by one. The two hostile armies seemed to assemble again. Drums were sounded and trumpets were blown. The onlookers watched the ghostly spectacle with fear and suspense.



गद्य-चमन, दे. दुन

20. When Vyāsa chanted mantras, the ghost warriors rose out of the river waters. Those who lived conversed with those who had been slain and had departed.

They saw Bhīshma, Dṛoṇa, Abhimanyu, Kārṇa Dhṛiṣhtadyumna, Drupada, Draupadī's sons Duryodhana and his brothers and all others. It was a night when sentiments rose to the highest pitch. Parents caressed their sons, widows clung to their husbands, sisters embraced their brothers. All wept tears of joy. Those who were living freely conversed with those who were slain on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The long years of mourning seemed to be a matter of the past.

However, the night passed swiftly. Dawn began to break and the dead bade farewell.

D. THE ELDERS PERISHED IN A FOREST FIRE:

Two years later, Nārada informed Yudhishthira that a great fire swept the forest and Dhṛitrāshtra, Gāndhārī and Kuntī, who were old, made no efforts to save themselves and perished in the conflagration. Sanjaya was asked by Dhṛitrāshtra to leave. He retired to the Himālayas to spend the rest of his life-time there in prayers.

It took months and years for the Pāndavas to forget the sorrow caused by the death of their dear mother. Time alone proved a healer.

CHAPTER XVI

MAUSALA PARVA

(DESTRUCTION OF THE YĀDAVAS AT DWARIKĀ)

A. THE TRAGEDY AT PRABHĀSA:

Thirty-six years had gone by after the battle of Kurukshetra. Kṛishṇa could see the dreadful future written in the skies, for the entire family of the Vṛishṇis, to which he himself belonged. There was the curse of Gāndhārī. Besides, some time back a few sages had also cursed the entire family. The Vṛishṇis had lost their sense of righteousness. Kṛishṇa himself was tired of life.

Once three sages, Vishwāmitra, Kanva and Nārada, had arrived at Dwarikā. The young members of the family, just out of fun, tried to play pranks on them. They dressed Sāmbā as a girl and asked the sages if they could prophesy whether she would have a daughter or a son. The sages, who were unhappy with this act of insolence on the part of the mischievous young people, gave a curse: "Yes, this 'woman' will give birth to an iron rod which will bring about the destruction of the entire

family of the Vṛishṇis.” The young people went to seek help of Kṛishṇa and Balarāma. The iron rod was powdered and its dust thrown into the sea. Out of the powdered dust grew up sea weeds, each weed proving to be a dreadful weapon at the crucial hour.

One day, the entire family of the Vṛishṇis went to a religious place, called Prabhāsātīrtha, close to Dwarikā. The whole day was spent in sports, feasting and drinking. Sātyaki and Kṛitivarman picked up a quarrel in their drunken mood. Sātyaki passed a sarcastic remark on Kṛitivarman, who had been one of the three surviving warriors on the side of the Kauravas and had made the heinous mid-night attack on the Pāṇḍava camp after the battle was over. Pradyumna, the son of Kṛishṇa, took the side of Sātyaki and was killed. The drunken brawl soon turned into a drunken open fight. Those who had no weapons picked up the sea weeds and indulged in mutual slaughter. Kṛishṇa himself picked up a few of these sea weeds and threw them among those who were fighting. It was death to all. Only Balarāma, Kṛishṇa and Dāruka, Kṛishṇa’s charioteer, survived.

B. THE TIME FOR THE DEPARTURE OF BALARĀMA AND KṚISHṆA:

Both Kṛishṇa and Balarāma knew that the time for their departure had come.

Balarāma, disgusted with the drunken brawl, left Dwarikā and arrived at the sea-shore where he sat in the yoga trance. Kṛishṇa who could not bear to look at Dwarikā without his people, took leave of his father, Vāsudeva, and arrived at the spot where his brother was sitting in a trance. He sent his charioteer, Dāruka, to Hastināpur to bring Arjuna who could take care of the surviving women and children. Balarāma is said to have been the incarnation of Shesha, the serpent on which lies Lord Viṣṇu. An immense white snake, the Sheshnag, came out of the mouth of Balarāma and he passed away.

Kṛishṇa retired to the forest, where he lay on the ground and went to sleep. A hunter mistook him for a gazelle and shot an arrow which pierced the sole of Kṛishṇa's foot at the spot where alone he could be mortally wounded. Thus Kṛishṇa also departed to the heavens.

Kṛishṇa is said to have been the incarnation of Viṣṇu. Long before, he had told Arjuna: "Every person born in this world has to serve a purpose. Once that purpose is served, the earth has no more

need of him. The purpose of my life has been fulfilled and I must go. So will you and your brothers." The poet explains that Kṛishṇa was born as a man and he died as a man, with something to bring about his death.

C. THE SEA SWALLOWED DWARIKĀ:

On receiving the news from Dārūka, Arjuna hastened to Dwarikā, where he found women and children wailing for the dead. Kṛishṇa's father, Vāsudeva, too had died. Arjuna made arrangements for the cremation of all including Vāsudeva, Kṛishṇa and Balarāma. Several of the women ascended the funeral pyres of their husbands.

Arjuna left with the surviving women and children. It was a mournful procession. Dwarikā had not a soul; it had deserted look.

On the way to Hastināpur, some robbers descended upon the procession to carry away the women and their belongings. Arjuna tried to string the Gāndīva but he failed. His quiver was empty. He seemed powerless.

On reaching Hastināpur, Arjuna just felt exhausted and fainted. Arjuna and his brothers came to realise that the purpose of their life had been fulfilled and there was no reason why they should continue to live.

CHAPTER XVII

MAHAPRASTHĀNIKA PARVA (JOURNEY TOWARDS THE HEAVENS)

A. THE TIME TO LEAVE THE WORLD:

After the death of Krishna, the Pāndava brothers began to feel that there was nothing left to live for in the world. At Dwarikā Arjuna had seen the end of the power of the Yādavas. Deep gloom fell upon the Pāndavas thereafter. Vyāsa also appeared before them and revealed that the time for their departure from the world had come. It was time to renounce the attachment to everything that was so dear to them in the world and to set out on the final journey.

Yudhishthira crowned Parikshita as the king. Yuyutsu was appointed as the guardian and Kṛipā as the guru. He counselled Parikshita and Yuyutsu to live at peace with each other. The people of the capital were also informed that the Pāndava brothers were ready for the final journey.

The Pāndavas cast off the royal garments and jewels and put on the garb of hermits—deer skin

and tree barks. Draupadī also did likewise. They bade farewell to Hastināpur and its people. Their faces were calm and serene; they had acquired peace of mind and soul.

B. THE FINAL JOURNEY:

Yudhishtira walked in front, next to him came Bhīma, followed by Arjuna, and then, in order, the twin brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva. Last of all walked Draupadī. Behind them all walked the only living being that shared their journey—a dog. The noble-minded sons of Pāndu walked with their faces towards the east, their hearts yearning for union with the Infinite. They had abandoned the worldly belongings.

First they went to Dwarikā, the city that was submerged under water. They stood on the shore of the briny sea. Agni appeared before them and said to Arjuna: “I got the Gāndīva and the quivers for you from Varuṇa. Now you do not need them. Give them back to Varuṇa.” Arjuna threw them into the ocean.

The Pāndavas then travelled towards the north, till they reached the northern regions and watched the glory of the snow-clad mountains—the Himavana. Beyond its lofty peaks they arrived at Mount Meru, the king of mountains.

C. THEY BEGAN TO FALL BY THE WAYSIDE:

As they advanced, something dreadful occurred. One by one, they fell by the wayside, all except Yudhishtira and the dog. Bhīma was shocked at the fall of his companions. Unable to understand why innocent and guiltless persons be thus struck down by Fate, Bhīma sought the answer from Yudhishtira. For each one Yudhishtira gave the reason. Draupadī was the first to fall; she was pure, and that was why she could reach so far, but out of all husbands her heart was bound with more affection for Arjuna. Sahadeva was the next to fall: the most humble-minded of all brothers but proud of his knowledge. Nakula fell next because of his vanity for his physical beauty. Arjuna too could not escape as he was boastfully confident of his power to destroy all his foes. Bhīma was the last to fall because of his pride and too great love of enjoyment.

Yudhishtira alone walked on, calm and unmoved, followed by his faithful dog. As he arrived close to Mount Meru, Lord Indra arrived in his chariot to welcome him. He said, "Ascend, O virtuous prince!" Yudhishtira looked back upon his fallen brothers and wanted them and Draupadī to accompany him to the heavens. Indra informed



चित्र-चमन, दे. दून.

21. The Pāṇḍavas cast off the royal garments, and accompanied by Draupadī and a dog, proceeded on their final journey. They fell one by one by the wayside.

him that they were already in the heavens. Then Yudhishtira insisted that his dog should also be admitted into heavens along with him. When Indra informed him that heaven was no place for dogs, Yudhishtira refused to desert the dog. As he spoke thus, the dog was transformed into Dharma, god of justice, who was extremely happy with Yudhishtira's consistency. Dharma said, "You are indeed my son. Your equal cannot be found."

Yudhishtira ascended the chariot of Indra. He was taken to the eternal city, Amarāvati. The great sage Nārada welcomed him there.

Nārada showed him all the kings who were his ancestors and had a place in the Heavens. He also saw Duryodhana seated on a jewelled throne. But he failed to see his brothers and Draupadī. Said Indra, "Forget all earthly ties and attain perfection here. Your brothers have all fallen by the way. You are the most righteous king that has ever ruled the earth. You have earned a place in the Heavens. You can be happy here."

Yudhishtira declined to stay in Heaven without his brothers and Draupadī. Said he, "I cannot stay here. Heaven is just Hell for me without my brothers and Draupadī. I am willing to forgo this great privilege. Please take me to the place where I can find them."

CHAPTER XVIII

SWARGĀROHANA PARVA

(ATTAINMENT OF SALVATION)

A. THE AGONY OF HELL:

Nārada explained why Duryodhana could attain heaven. It was because he died fighting bravely. He was a kshatriya and he died as a kshatriya should. Nārada also advised Yudhishtira to forget his anger against Duryodhana, because there is no place for enmity in Heaven.

All the time Yudhishtira was restless to meet his brothers. He was keen to meet his elder brother, Karṇa. He was equally keen to meet Dhṛishtadyumna, Abhimanyu, Sātyaki and others. He was still a human being and behaved as human beings do on earth. With anguish and indignation he felt that great injustice had been done to his brothers and other relations. He said to himself: "When that great sinner Duryodhana could get a seat in Heaven, why not his brothers?"

Indra said, "O Yudhishtira, if you are determined to meet your brothers and others, who were near and dear to you, my angels will



चित्र-चमन, दे. दुन

22. Yudhishtira declined to stay in Heaven when he saw Duryodhana and others there but missed his brothers and Draupadi. Indra and Nārada said: "Forget all earthly ties and attain perfection here."



23. Yudhishtira was taken to the lower regions. This was his last trial.

take you thither.” So Yudhishthira was conducted to the lower regions and across the Vaitarni to Hell where his brothers and Draupadī were supposed to be. It was a dense forest where the leaves of the trees were like sharp weapons and the path was covered with razors. It was intensely dark and the air was full of foul and poisonous odour. The path was strewn with foul and mutilated corpses. Fierce and ugly birds of prey feasted on human flesh. The damned ones were burning in everlasting fires. The place was so inhospitable that Yudhishthira thought of retracing his steps. He was about to turn back when he heard the voices of his brothers and Draupadī, imploring him to stay on with them and give them comfort in their torture. Yudhishthira was shocked to find that people, who had committed no sins, were facing agony and torture in Hell and a sinner like Duryodhana was in Heaven. He decided to stay on in Hell with his brothers and Draupadī and share their sufferings.

This was the last trial of Yudhishthira. It was all an illusion. The scenes of horror all vanished. The air became sweet and fragrant. It was no more dark but sun-lit and bright. Indra smiled and said, “We are pleased with you. You had to pass through hell for that one ‘lie’ which you spoke when Drona was killed. A person whose good actions exceed

his sins stays in hell for a very snort time. Once the sins are cleansed, he goes to the Heavens.

B. THE ETERNAL REST:

Yudhishtira was then led to the river Gangā. After bathing in it he cast off his mortal body and became celestial. He entered Swarga, the Celestial City of Indra. Here, he was welcomed by Kṛishṇa in all glory and his brothers and Draupadī. Bhīshma had joined the Vasus, as he was one of those. Droṇa entered into Brihaspati (Jupiter), Karṇa entered into Sun and Vidura and Yudhishtira became one with Dharma. Kṛishṇa was one with Nārāyaṇa of whom he was an incarnation.

Yudhishtira ultimately found eternal rest and happiness, which was unattainable one arth.

Indra said: "This is how the mortals rise in 'Eternal Bliss', casting off their mortal bodies and entering the shining portals of the Celestial City."



चित्र-यमन, द. दुन

EPILOGUE

At the end, Vaishampāyana told king Janamejaya: "This is the sanctifying epic composed by that great exponent of truth, sage Vyāsa. Called 'Itihāsa', it is sacred, purifying and excellent...

The great race of the Bharatas is its topic. Hence it is called Bhārata. And because of its grave meaning, as also of the Bharatas being its topic, it is called Mahābhārata. That which is in this is elsewhere; that which does not occur here occurs nowhere else. This history is known by the name of 'Jaya'.

Vyāsa made another compilation consisting of sixty lakhs of verses. Thirty lakhs of these are placed in the region of the Celestial. In the region of Patris fifteen lakh verses are current, while in that of the Yakshas fourteen lakhs are current. One lakh of verses are current among the human beings.

With uplifted arms I am crying aloud but, alas, no one listens:

'From righteousness alone one can gain material welfare and realise his desires as well.

Why should not righteousness, therefore, be pursued? Not for any desire, not out of fear, not out of avarice, not even for the sake of one's life, should one give up the path of righteousness.'

This treatise is purifying and sacred. This is the highest indicator as regards duties. Those who desire prosperity should listen to it. The Mahābhārata is the highest end. Sins committed by the listeners, by means of body or by means of mind, are all dissipated as darkness disappears on sunrise. Such a person sports happily in the region of Vishṇu like Vishṇu Himself.

GLOSSARY

Abhimanyu	The son of Arjuna and Subhadra
Ādiratha	A charioteer who brought up Karṇa
Agni	The God of Fire
Ambā	The eldest daughter of the king of Kāshi
Ambālikā	The youngest daughter of the king of Kāshi; married to Vichitravīrya
Ambikā	The younger daughter of the king of Kāshi; married to Vichitravīrya
Arjuna	The son of Pāndu and Kuntī; one of the five Pandavas
Ashwasena	The son of Takshaka; a snake
Ashwatthāmā	The son of Dronāchārya
Ātri	A noted sage; progenitor of the Lunar race of the Kshatriyas
Babhruvāhana	The son of Arjuna by Chitrangadā
Bakāsura	A giant killed by Bhīma
Balarāma	The elder brother of Kṛishṇa
Bhagadatta	The king of Prāgajyotisha
Bharata	An eminent king of the Lunar race; the son of Dushyanta
Bhīma	The second son of Pāndu and Kuntī; one of the Pāndavas
Bhīshma	The son of Shāntanu and Gangā; called Pitāmaha (Grandfather)
Brahmā	The Creator of the World
Brihannāla	The name adopted by Arjuna at Virātanagar
Brihaspati	The God of the Devatās (Jupiter)
Chitrāngada	The elder son of Shāntanu and Satyawatī
Chitrāngadā	The princess of Manipur; the wife of Arjuna
Chitrasena	A gāndharva king
Dāruka	The charioteer of Kṛishṇa
Devavrata	The name of Gangā's son by Shantanu; Bhīshma
Damagranthī	The name adopted by Nakula at VirātaNagar
Dhananjaya	One of the many names of Arjuna
Dhaumya	The priest of the Pāndavas
Dhrishtadyumna	The son of Drupada; brother of Draupadī

Dhṛitarāshtra	The son of Ambikā; blind ruler of Hastināpur; father of Duryodhana; brother of Pāndu
Draupadī	The daughter of Drupada, king of Panchāla; the wife of the five Pāndavas
Droṇācharya	The son of Bhāradwāja; the teacher of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas
Drupada	The king of Pānchāla
Duhshāsana	One of the brothers of Duryodhana
Durvāsā	A noted sage who granted a boon to Kuntī
Duryodhana	The eldest son of Dhṛitrāshtra
Dushshāla	The daughter of Dhṛitrāshtra; the sister of Duryodhana
Dvaipāyana	One of the names of Vyāsa
Gaṇapati	The God of Welfare who wrote out the Mahābhārata for Vyāsa
Gāndhārī	The wife of Dhṛitrāshtra
Gangā	The wife of Shāntanu; the mother of Bhīshma; the sacred river
Ghatotkacha	The son of Bhīma and Hidimbā
Hidimbā	A demon killed by Bhīma
Hidimbī	The sister of Hidimbā; married to Bhima
Indra	The Lord of the Heavens; the Lord of the East
Irāwata	The son of Arjuna
Janamejaya	The son of Parikshita and great grandson of Arjuna and grandson of Abhimanyu
Jarāsandha	The king of Magadha, killed by Bhīma
Jayadratha	The king of the Sindhus; married to Dushshāla; the sister of Duryodhana
Karṇa	The son of Kuntī and the Sun God; called Rādheya
Kīchaka	The commander of the army of Virātanagar
Kṛipāchārya	The teacher of the Kaurava and the Pāndava princes
Kṛitivarmā	A cousin of Kṛishṇa; fought on the side of Duryodhana
Kṛishṇa	The king of Dwārikā; the incarnation of Vishnu
Kubera	The God "Wealth; the Lord of the North
Kuntī	The daughter of Sūra; married to Pāndu; the mother of Karṇa and the five Pāndavas

Mādri	The wife of Pāṇdu and the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva
Mārkaṇḍeya	A noted sage who narrated instructive stories to Yudhishtira
Māyā	The architect of the Asuras; constructed the sabhā at Indraprastha
Nakula	The son of Pāṇdu and Mādri; the fourth of the Pāṇdavas
Nārada	A noted sage; the son of Brahma and Saraswati
Pārāshara	A noted sage; the father of Vyāsa
Parikshita	The posthumous son of Abhimanyu
Pārtha	A son of Prithā (Kuntī); the name of Arjuna
Puru	An ancestor of the Pāṇdavas
Purochana	A friend of Duryodhana; constructed Wax Palace
Rādhā	The wife of Ādhiratha who brought up Karṇa
Rādheya	The name of Karṇa, brought up by Rādhā
Sahadeva	The son of Pāṇdu and Mādri; the fifth of the Pāṇdavas
Sairandhrī	The name adopted by Draupadi in Virāta-nagar
Sanjaya	The charioteer of Dhṛitrashtira
Satya	One of the Vṛishṇis; related to Kṛishṇa
Satyavatī	The wife of Shāntanu; the mother of Chitrāṅgada and Vichitravīrya; also the mother of Vyāsa
Shakuni	The maternal uncle of Duryodhana
Shikhandin	Ambā born as the daughter of Drupada; half male warrior
Shishupāla	The king of Chedi; killed by Kṛishṇa
Subhadra	The sister of Kṛishṇa; married to Arjuna
Susharmā	The eldest of the brothers of Trigartadesha
Sūrya	The Sun God
Tantripāla	The name adopted by Sahadeva in Virāta-nagar
Uttarā	The daughter of king Virāta; married to Abhimanyu
Uttara Kumāra	The youngest son of Virāta
Vāsudeva	The father of Kṛishṇa
Vāsuki	The king of the serpents
Vichitravīrya	One of the two sons of Shāntanu and Satyavatī

Vidura	The son of Vyāsa by a slave girl: brother of Pāndu and Dhṛitrāshtra
Virāta	The king of Virātanagar
Vyāsa	A noted sage; the son of Satyawatī; the author of the Mahābhārata
Yayāti	One of the ancestors of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas
Yudhishthira	The son of Pāndu and Kuntī; the eldest of the Pāndavas
Yaksha	The form taken by the God of Dharma
Yama	The Lord of the South; the God of Death
Yuyutsu	The son of Dhṛitrāshtra by a non-kshatriya woman



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- Rendered into simple English, based on the original sources and contributions of great scholars, Indian and foreign.
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